







She turned her face to the pillow, and the couch shook from her sobs. (Page 104)

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

A STORY OF TO-DAY

By
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"AN ORIGINAL GIRL," Etc.

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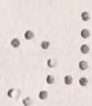
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REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

CHAPTER I.

EASTBURY folk gave to the sole living member of the Brower family the same high regard they had given to her once prominent father. The tradition of former wealth still clung to her and her own exclusiveness did the rest; also, that she was a young girl and a girl of unusual beauty, contributed much to the popular feeling for her in a country town where there were no rivals.

On this summer morning, seated on the low sill of the cottage window, she looked as fair and sweet as the roses which grew within touching distance in the garden below. She was strewing flower petals about her and humming a lively tune evidently in accord with her gay spirits. But the tune was suddenly stopped and she herself in some sense shocked as there sounded from the depths of the little room:

“And so you are going?”

The speaker was a tall, masculine looking woman with a form that showed angles instead of curves—angles everywhere, as if they were wantonly made.

Her face matched her form; hard, pallid, cold, indented with lines which were not the effect of age, and made repellent by a wide, rigid mouth and scanty, straight, black hair. The only redeeming feature of this uncomely face were the eyes, but even they, black and lustrous as they were, caused fear and repulsion rather than admiration. Her voice was deeper than the ordinary feminine tones, and there was a slowness and distinctness about her words painfully unnatural, being in such strange contrast to her quick, nervous motions.

The girl sprang from her seat:

“Yes, I am going, and why should I not go, Barbara Balk?” her face flushing hotly, and her whole manner showing disdainful defiance.

But Miss Balk did not depart from her uncompromising attitude, nor from her painfully slow and distinct tones.

“Because there is no legitimate reason for you to go, and because, if you do go, you will return more filled with vanity and folly than you are now. These are the reasons why you should not go, Helen Brower.”

The girl laughed saucily.

“Do you think I am going to resign the only chance I ever had, and perhaps ever shall have, of seeing a

great city like New York? Don't be a fool, Barbara, and set up those antiquated notions of yours against the customs of civilization and good society. I expect to return knowing a good deal more than I know now, for you may be sure I shall keep my eyes and ears open, and what if I do come back with better taste about my own dress, and disposed to give even *you* some ideas about your ugly old costume? What do you say to that, Barbara?" and she laughed heartily.

Miss Balk waited in haughty silence for the mirth to subside; then, without a change in her countenance or the slightest alteration in her unnatural manner of speaking, she replied:

"You are a vain fool, Helen Brower, and you'll come to grief through that vanity of yours before you die, mark my words. Where you're going now you'll run your head into a noose of your own making, and you'll break somebody's heart, but it won't be your own—oh, no! it will not be your own."

A grim smile played for an instant about Miss Balk's thin, pallid lips.

Helen began to pout.

"I do not know why you say such things to me; I am not beholden to you, Barbara Balk, and when my father died he did not charge you to be my mentor, and I shall not submit to such dictation," shaking her head and straightening her slight figure.

"Better for you your father left somebody to be your

mentor. But it makes little difference; your tether will be short; faces like yours do too much mischief to reign long; and now, having told you to your face truths that other people will say behind your back, I should like to ask you a question on my own account. What do you intend shall become of me during your absence?"

"*You!*" with an accent of intense astonishment. "Why, you will stay here, of course, and keep house as usual."

"Oh, indeed! And entertain the rats, I suppose, that make nightly feast in the garret over my head? Thank you, but I purpose doing no such thing. You have said *you* would be afraid to live here alone. I see no reason why I should have more courage."

"Why, Barbara, you are forty years old, and I am only nineteen, and you have lived here and kept house for papa ever so many years. Of what can you possibly be afraid?"

"Not of abduction, certainly, you would say if your prudence hadn't checked you," replied Miss Balk, with a sarcasm that made her unnaturally slow tones still more unfeminine and painful. "But, nevertheless, I decline to perform the part of hostess to myself, and during the half-year of your absence I shall board with Mrs. Burchill."

"Mrs. Burchill!" There was amazement and dismay in Miss Brower's exclamation.

“Yes; Mrs. Burchill. Does it astonish and displease you? Are you afraid that I shall tell Gerald Thurston disparaging things of you; that I shall describe to him your vanity and selfishness; that I shall tell how your very gentleness of manner, which he and everybody else admires, is only another offshoot of your vanity; that there is no genuine kindness in it, and that he’ll never know until he marries you how little real heart you have? Bah! don’t be afraid. I shall not tell him; if he is silly enough to be caught by your pretty face, let him put up with the consequence.”

“If we were both men, Barbara Balk, I’d strike you where you stand,” and the flaming cheeks and eyes and clinched hands of the speaker evinced a very desperate inclination to enforce her threat, regardless of sex.

Miss Balk was not in the least dismayed. She folded her long, bony, scantily-covered arms, and looked down scornfully on the indignant young beauty.

“Keep your wrath, Helen,” she said; “you’ll only waste it on me.”

But the girl’s sudden anger had changed as suddenly to passionate grief; she flung herself on the floor and sobbed:

“Oh, papa! why did you insist that I should keep this woman with me?”

Miss Balk was as little moved by the sight of her

companion's tears as she had been by her anger, and waiting only for the sobs to become sufficiently subdued for her own voice to be heard, she said:

"Your father insisted that I should remain with you because he knew that I was the only one who would tell you the truth about yourself. And now, you'd better not cry any more, but just face what you can't get away from; that's me. You'll never get away from me till one or the other of us is taken by death. If you attempt to leave me, I'll follow you; I'll haunt you, and I'll publish the story of your broken promise to your dying father until you are shamefully disgraced. I won't disturb you while you are on this visit, even if you should make it longer than the six months you say you will stay; but you must write regularly, and there's Gerald Thurston coming in."

There had been no change in the tone of her voice, nor in her slow manner of speech, as she uttered the last words, so that the weeping beauty on the floor did not immediately catch their purport; when she did, the old-fashioned knocker was already sounding, and Miss Balk had gone, with her heavy step, to open the door. Helen hastily gathered herself up, and fled into another room.

CHAPTER II.

MANLY was the most fitting term with which to describe the young fellow whom Miss Balk, with grim politeness, was ushering in. He had neither the regularity of feature nor the richness of complexion to be styled handsome, but he had the strong, athletic physique and manly bearing which go to women's hearts far quicker than mere beauty of face.

He seated himself with graceful familiarity to await Miss Brower's coming, and without again addressing Miss Balk; there was never much intercourse between these two, owing to a settled antipathy on the part of each. And Miss Balk, having brushed with her apron the window sill which Helen had littered with flower petals, went in grim silence from the room.

Miss Brower's tear stains had been carefully washed away, and her curls put back into their proper becoming fashion. Her face, with its smiles and its blushes and its expression of arch surprise and delight, looked to Thurston, as she came gracefully into the room, the prettiest sight he had ever seen. Nor did he attempt to conceal his admiration; it flashed out in the glow of

pleasure which suffused his own face and in the eager and yet half deferential way in which he rose, and extended both hands to greet her.

“I did not expect you until—until to-night,” she said, with a pretty assumption of bashfulness, and an attempt to withdraw the little white hands which were held so firmly.

“Nor did I expect myself to have the pleasure of so early a visit; but Mr. Robinson gave me a couple of hours this morning in return for my detention last evening, and I came over to talk a little further about this matter of your going away.”

She gave her head an impatient toss. “One would think I was going to New Zealand, or South Africa, or I don’t know where, the way you and Barbara Balk go on about my going. I declare it is too bad. Here’s Barbara making my life perfectly miserable, and now you——”

She stopped suddenly, and let her tears have their way sufficiently to make her eyes and long, dark, exquisite eyelashes glisten; but there she stopped them, for if allowed to brim over they would probably make her nose red and spoil her interesting appearance.

Her lover became grave and concerned; emotion in Helen, and that emotion caused by himself, was like a dagger stab to him.

“It is not possible,” he said, “that woman has dared to question or reprove any of your plans, or——”

"It is possible," she interrupted. "Indeed, there are times when she makes me wish I was lying with papa."

Now was an appropriate time for her tears to flow, even if they did make her pretty nose a little red; accordingly, she let a very few drops trickle affectingly down her cheeks.

The young fellow became desperate. "Helen," he said, "that promise made to your dying father was not meant to bind you after your marriage. Marry me now, before you go away, and Miss Balk—well, I understand that she has sufficient means to provide another home for herself."

"Marry you, and papa dead only three months! Surely, Gerald, you cannot mean that? A year, at least, I must have; I could not put off my mourning sooner."

A strange feeling passed over the young fellow at her last words. Was his idol not all he painted her? Was this beautiful exterior, this gracious gentleness which made her so charming, only gilding after all? He released her hands and looked anxiously down at her. Never was there a more perfect picture of womanly beauty and modesty than she at that moment presented. The timid, downcast air she had assumed, the tears still upon her cheeks, the heaving of her breast as if from inward sobs, all combined to exert an influence which honest Gerald Thurston could no

more resist than he could stem the tide of a madly rushing river.

"A year then, Helen," he said, taking her hands again. "But only a year, and for half that time, at least, you will be free from Barbara Balk. You told me the other night she was not going with you."

"No; she will board with Mrs. Burchill."

"With Mrs. Burchill! There will be the devil to pay! Beg your pardon, Helen, but I was surprised into the profanity. What, in the name of all that's wicked, put it into her head to go there?"

"I don't know, unless it is because *you* are there."

"*I*! Why, she hates me as his Satanic majesty is said to hate the sight of a cowl."

"Well, it's owing to some perversity of hers," said Helen a little impatiently, as if she was desirous of changing the subject; "though," she continued, "I shall be rid of her for six months and you, Gerald, will have her."

"Yes, with a vengeance. I wonder if Mrs. Burchill will have the bad taste to place her opposite me at table? I don't believe I could stand those eyes of hers; they'd have me riddled in less than half the time you are to be away."

"I thought you came over to talk about my journey? Here is a half hour gone, and you have not begun to discuss it yet."

She spoke in a light, playful tone, but even her lover

detected the impatience and dissatisfaction for the concealment of which that tone had been assumed.

“Yes,” he said gravely. “I want to have my mind quite clear on every matter connected with you; you yourself have given me this right to a knowledge of all your actions, have you not?” And he touched for an instant the ring which sparkled on her finger.

“Yes,” she answered, archly; “to a knowledge, but not to a *control* of my actions yet.”

Without seeming to notice her reply, he resumed,—“This family in New York, whom you are going to visit—comprising, I think you told me, the father, mother, and two daughters—are they wealthy?”

“Very. Magnificent house, their own carriage, yearly trip to Europe, and all that,” manifesting an enthusiasm in her description which struck a sort of chill to her lover.

“How is it these people having such ample means of entertaining you”—there was an almost imperceptible sarcasm in his tones; but, faint as it was, it somewhat disconcerted Helen, and dashed for a moment the glow with which she would have given further details—“have never tendered an invitation to you before?”

“They have. I thought I told you some time ago.” Her eyes distended in astonishment at his ignorance of what, to do her justice, she really supposed he had known, and she continued, eagerly, “Why, Mr. Tillotson was the best friend papa ever had; they were at

college together, and when papa became so reduced that he had to come here from Boston and live, right after the death of my mamma when I was a very little girl, Mr. Tillotson offered to place papa in business again, and to send me away to school with his own daughters; but papa was so spirited and proud he would not accept either offer; he preferred to live here in this plain way, and to educate me himself. The only thing that he regretted was that he couldn't send me abroad for my music, but even that he himself taught me very well; at least you, who have heard fine musicians, do not find fault with my execution."

"No; it pleases me," he answered, with a preoccupied air, and then he turned away and seemed to be looking very intently at the fragrant little garden lying almost on a level with the low open windows.

"Why don't you continue your catechism?" she asked, after waiting a moment, and watching him with a puzzled air.

He turned to her quickly.

"All that you have told me is but a detail of Mr. Tillotson's kindness to your father; there is no account of any courtesy to you from the ladies of the family."

"Oh!"—with a little affected start, but the affectation was not suspected by the honest fellow awaiting her reply—"I have forgotten. Invitations from the whole family to me came frequently whenever they were home from Europe; but papa's health would not suffer him

to accompany me, and he would not permit me to go without him. This last invitation, which I have accepted, was sent immediately that they heard of papa's death, for, owing to their protracted stay in Europe, they did not hear of it until a fortnight ago. They are also the more urgent for my acceptance of this invitation, as both daughters are to be married in a couple of months, and I am, in some measure, to take their place for some time after their departure. I suppose if there was a son in the family you would like to forbid my going," she continued saucily.

"I should like to forbid it now," he said, very gravely, and placing his hand on her arm.

She flung it off.

"I declare you are too bad, Gerald; you forget that I have never been to New York, and that I have no society here, and that—and that——"

Failing to find another cause of reproach, she was obliged to leave her sentence in its ambiguous, unfinished form, but he completed it:

"And that you are pretty, and would like to have New York admirers. Yes, I know it all, Helen; and I suppose I ought to remember that you are a woman, and a very young woman at that, and I ought not to be too hard upon you—nor shall I; but listen to me, and bear with me if I speak very seriously."

He took her hands again, and tried to look down into her eyes, but he could only see the white lids fringed

by their long, dark lashes, for she kept her eyes down.

“Mr. Robinson seems to be much pleased with me, and he hints at giving me a more responsible position than the one I now hold. He is hard and close with his employees, you know, and it requires peculiar management to suit him; but I have succeeded so far, and I have no doubt of continuing to do so, so long as I pursue a strictly honest and straightforward course. Then there is something else—a great hope which may be fulfilled; and if it should be, you as my wife shall be as rich as these Tillotsons are.

“What do you mean?”

He had no difficulty now in looking down into her eyes; they were lifted to his, bright with curiosity and expectation. Again he experienced that unpleasant feeling which had assailed him in the earlier part of the interview, a feeling akin to distrust of his beautiful betrothed, and again, as on that previous occasion, a longer look at the exquisite face disarmed him. He proceeded:

“I cannot tell you, nor must you seek to know, for it may be only a false hope after all. I can hardly tell why I spoke of it to you at this time unless I thought it might moderate your eagerness to go away just now. Helen”—his tones changed, becoming quick and somewhat impassioned—“if you knew what I have suffered in my past life from the want of affection, you would hardly blame me for my apparently strange and un-



“ And you are to be very careful about those New York Admirers.”

reasonable fears now. I have given my whole heart to you, and if you should prove false—God! if you should prove false!”

As if in his imagination he were realizing that of which he spoke, he flung her hands from him and began to pace the room. Helen, surprised and alarmed, watched him. But his paroxysm of jealousy or distrust, or whatever it might have been, passed and he turned to her penitent and even a little humbled.

“Forgive me. I have frightened you; but when you know my past, as you shall know it one day, you will understand and pity me. There, look up, bonny love, and tell me when you shall start. I am to drive you to Boston, you know, and to see you safely on board the train; and you are to write every week; and you are to be very careful about those New York admirers in order not to make me jealous; and you are to be very anxious about Miss Balk and myself as to how we shall get on in the same house together, and——”

“Stop! you are stunning me with this nonsense,” and one little white hand was placed over his mouth. She was pacified and happy, and he—he was neither, but she did not know that.

CHAPTER III.

GERALD THURSTON drove his betrothed to Boston, and during the long drive in the early summer morning he was more in love with her than ever. The fresh, balmy air, the beauty of the surrounding country, the bright anticipations which filled her mind, the consciousness of her beauty, which she felt was never more perfect, all added to give a flow of spirits that was irresistibly bewitching to her companion. He could only look and listen and secretly chide himself for being so silent, but he pretended to be anxious about the horse, which was really a spirited young animal and one not altogether to be trusted, and she was too selfishly absorbed in her own delight to care particularly about the reception of her mirthful remarks.

There was quite a concourse of people at the depot, for the season of summer travel had set in, and Helen's bright eyes, always critically observant, rested in turn on each of the strangers while she waited for Gerald to get her ticket. There were some evidently country folk, and she became interested in contrasting them with the city people. Helen was an aristocrat by birth and education; one motion which denoted culture won

her regard quicker than the costliest attire, if such were unaccompanied by the evidence of good breeding, and now as she saw Gerald returning to her she watched to see how his bearing compared with those about him. It was all that even she could desire, and it was with a glow of pride that she saw more than one stranger turn to look again at the tall, athletic, gentlemanly young fellow, whose plain clothes—and they were very plain, she acknowledged to herself—sat upon him with as neat and becoming a grace as the more elegant and stylish apparel of the city men about him. She wondered, as she had wondered a hundred times before, whence Gerald had come or where he had been educated to give him the superior and cultured air which always characterized him; but she was as little able to answer her question now as she had been on previous occasions.

All that she knew of Gerald Thurston was that, five years before, he had come to the village of Eastbury with a letter of introduction to Mr. Robinson, the wealthy proprietor of a large factory; he was at that time about twenty-one years of age, and by his gentlemanly deportment, his good judgment in the business with which Mr. Robinson intrusted him, the superior education he seemed to possess, he won the respect, confidence, and in some instances the warm friendship of all the residents of the village. Accident had enabled him to render some service to Helen's father, and

he, captivated by the young man's simple, manly bearing, took him at once to his heart, not only urging upon him the frequent hospitality of his home, but seeming to design an attachment between him and his daughter. From such an attachment the young stranger shrank, but won by a beauty the most exquisite he had ever seen in woman, and manners which appeared to be those of an angel, he was fatally caught at last. For Helen it had been easy to favor her father's design; the high-bred air of the stranger, his perfect gentlemanliness, his magnificent physique, were sufficient passport to her heart, even if they had not been supported by the fact that, owing to her seclusion, he was her first suitor.

She was aware, however, that her father knew the young man's antecedents, for on one occasion Mr. Brower had said to her:

"I know everything about Gerald now; he has told me himself voluntarily, and while there are strange, and even unpleasant, circumstances connected with his past life, they are circumstances which place his character in a most creditable light. I am quite satisfied with him, and I agree with him in thinking it is best to say nothing of these things to you at present, my dear; there is really no necessity. *I* am satisfied, and that is enough."

Something of all this was recurring to Helen's mind as she watched her lover's advance, but the whistle of the approaching train was heard, and the people about

her began to exchange their adieus. Gerald escorted her on board, to be sure that her seat was comfortable, and to thrust into her hand a pretty little basket of fruit and a paper. By so doing he narrowly escaped being forced to accompany her; as it was, he had to make a huge spring, and then he stood by the side of the track, and watched her bright face looking out at him from the window until it became a dim speck. Could he have known, could he have foreseen their next place of meeting, he would have wished that it was his dead and mangled body which looked up to her from the side of the railroad track.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. BURCHILL'S was the chef-d'oeuvre of a little boarding-house. Pretty, tasteful, embowered amid trees, its clean, white-painted exterior attracted even the notice of strangers; within everything was in harmony,—from good, practical, warm-hearted Mrs. Burchill, her cheery, old-fashioned, good-natured father-in-law, and her graceful, lady-like daughter, down to the large, healthy, willing servant girl. Her boarders were few, owing to the limited accommodation of her house, and her own much to be commended but unusually rare anxiety about each one's especial comfort. Thus, when Miss Balk called and stated her desire to make one of Mrs. Burchill's household, she was met with a little doubtful shake of the head from the good lady herself.

“I don't know how I could manage it, ma'am. There's Mr. Thurston, he has the best bedroom: I wouldn't disturb him on no account; and there's father, I wouldn't put him out of his room,—and——”

“I do not wish you to put any one out of his room,” said Miss Balk, bridling with anger, though her words were uttered in her usual slow manner. “I only want

you to say at once whether you can accommodate me for the six months of Miss Brower's absence."

Large in form and practical in mind as Mrs. Burchill was, it must be acknowledged that she was somewhat afraid of this grim woman, whose severe face and stringent tongue had caused fear on previous occasions to more than one village dame; then, also, she felt in secret not a little honored by this choice of her house rather than a more stylish and wealthy one, for Miss Balk was said to have ample means, while, in addition, to be visited from the Brower household was an honor in itself; the Browsers lived in such strict seclusion, and held themselves, even in their comparative poverty, so much above their neighbors.

"Well, ma'am, I'll be able to manage it if my daughter is willing to give up her room to you; she can share mine. She'll be home from school directly, if you don't mind waiting," and the best chair in the little parlor was drawn forward, and Miss Balk bidden to seat herself.

At that instant a young girl was entering the house. Mrs. Burchill's quick ear caught the sound and, stepping into the passage-way, she called, pleasantly:

"Mildred!"

To which was responded a pleasantly spoken:

"Yes, mother; I am coming."

In another moment Miss Balk found herself introduced to a tall, graceful girl whose clear, frank gray

eyes met Miss Balk's bold, piercing gaze more undauntedly than most people did. The young girl—she seemed scarcely sixteen, though unusually tall for her years—looked grave when her mother stated the business for which she had summoned her, and she hesitated as if holding some mental debate.

Her mother watched her anxiously, for, to tell the truth, because of the reasons before given she was anxious to oblige Miss Balk.

“Would it be a great accommodation to you, Miss Balk?” and the clear eyes seemed to go through the cold, hard, indented face.

Barbara, who was already standing, drew herself up very stiffly.

“I do not wish to be considered as begging for board here; I am not restricted to Mrs. Burchill's house, I am sure.”

And the scant, black, brocaded mantle was gathered more closely round her arms in preparation for departure.

“Oh, don't take it in that light, ma'am,” interposed Mrs. Burchill, in some affright. “Mildred meant nothing by what she said, and I am sure she'll be willing to give up her room; it will only be for a few months. Won't you, dear?”

“If you wish me to do so, mother, yes; but Miss Balk has not seen my room; perhaps it will not suit her.”

It was evident that there was a wish in the heart of the girl that it would not suit.

Her wish was not gratified, however; the room suited, and would have done so had it been much less than the fair-sized, very neatly furnished apartment that it was, for Miss Balk had her private reasons, despite her assumption of independence, for desiring to board with Mrs. Burchill.

To Gerald Thurston's disgust, he found his prediction of Mrs. Burchill's bad taste fulfilled. Miss Balk's angular form, arrayed in skimp black silk, directly confronted him at the table, and her bold black eyes riddled his face, as he had expressed it.

His salutation of her was perfectly courteous, but extremely brief, and he bent immediately to his plate.

On Miss Balk's right hand sat Mrs. Burchill's old, cheery little father-in-law. His cheeks were as plump and rosy as the soft and bright-hued peach that lay upon her plate, and his small blue eyes twinkled as brightly as they might have done twenty years before. His whole neat, clean appearance bespoke the affectionate care of his daughter-in-law's hand, and his good-humored countenance was a pleasant contrast to the straight, stiff, masculine-looking woman at his side. With his old-country notions of politeness, he thought it incumbent upon him to devote himself to this new boarder at his daughter's table, and Miss Balk found herself the recipient of attentions which, well meant

though they were, were so ludicrous that Mildred, on the opposite side of the table, became almost convulsed from suppressed laughter; even Thurston had to look up, the little old gentleman's speeches were so irresistibly funny.

"Oh, ma'am, if you were in the old country your appetite would get a wonderful recruiting. You're not eating a bit. Ain't I watching you?" as Barbara uttered a dignified disclaimer against receiving any more upon her plate. "And you'd grow more lissome if you were there; you wouldn't be so stiff in the back—you'd——"

There was an explosive sound from the other side of the table. Mildred seemed to be making violent efforts to suppress a fit of coughing: in reality, it was laughter. Her sense of the ridiculous was so keen that it frequently exceeded her control, and she was obliged to turn her head quite aside and bury her face in her handkerchief. The humorous muscles of Thurston's countenance also twitched violently, and the more so that the poor little old man, unconscious of having said anything to provoke mirth, and unsuspecting that it was laughter and not coughing had been the cause of the interruption, was again devoting himself to Miss Balk. She, however, sharper than her companion at table, divined perfectly the cause of the pretended coughing and the reason of the amused look on Gerald's face, and she inwardly fumed with indignation. Drawing her-

self up with such rigidity that it might well justify the poor old gentleman's opinion of the stiffness of her back, she dashed her plate from her and turned upon him the most terrible look of her baneful eyes. Her anger was quite lost upon him, however; he was too well contented with himself and with the rest of the world, and he had too good-natured a disposition to take rebuffs while there was the shadow of an excuse for declining to accept the same; so he simply put her plate a little further away than her impatient hand had already dashed it and said, while he helped himself from the steaming dish of fried potatoes:

"There's no use in life, ma'am, in being so vehement," with an emphasis that was laughable on the middle syllable of the last word; "a little coolness in everything is better, and if there's one charge——"

But Miss Balk did not wait to hear the charge; she hastened out to the front piazza to cool her indignation and to debate with herself whether she should remain in a house where she was likely, through that stupid old man, to become an object of ridicule.

The stupid old man, finding the stiff lady gone, was about to address the rest of his remarks to his now openly laughing granddaughter and the broadly smiling Thurston, when a sudden comprehension of the real state of affairs entered his mind.

"I wasn't the cause of sending her from the table, was I?" he asked, with his fork half-way to his mouth,

and his ruddy face a most amusing picture of alarm. "I'll go this minute and ask her pardon."

"Don't," said his granddaughter, now giving way unrestrainedly to her mirth, but at the same time starting up to prevent such a catastrophe as she feared the threatened apology might cause; she felt that it surely would not quell the flame of Miss Balk's wrath.

At that instant Mrs. Burchill entered from the kitchen, where her duties generally detained her long after the commencement of each meal, and she saw from the embarrassed and affrighted air of her father-in-law and the merriment of her daughter that something unusual had occurred. The old gentleman gave his account, a truthful one, but one so amusing from his manner of telling it that even Thurston's hearty laugh rang out.

The good woman was quite distressed; she feared that Miss Balk had been seriously offended, and in her perplexity she was about to go out herself to Barbara, and in her simple fashion endeavor to apologize; but Mildred had crossed to her and was now standing with her hand on her mother's arm.

"Mother," she said in a voice so peculiarly quiet and firm that it attracted Thurston's attention, "it is not your place to offer any apology to this woman; she came to us of her own accord, and if she is too obtuse or too narrow-hearted to see that poor grandfather's attentions are kindly meant, why we must leave her to

the unhappiness of her own ill humor. Don't look so distressed, grandfather; you did nothing wrong, and it were a shame to subject you to a moment's anxiety on account of this person."

"God bless you, Milly!" That was the old man's fond diminutive for his granddaughter; and he took one of her hands and stroked it fondly. Mrs. Burchill, convinced of the truth of her daughter's words, a conviction to which she was much helped by her own strong affection for her father-in-law, said, quietly:

"I believe you are right, my child; but I'll change her seat at the table."

Gerald Thurston had not withdrawn his eyes from Mildred. His gaze followed her even when she returned to her unfinished breakfast. One reason of his marked attention at this time was that he never had heard Miss Burchill speak at such length and in such a manner before. Though for two years a boarder in her mother's house, owing to his business cares and his beautiful betrothed, which left him little time out of the factory, his own room, or Miss Brower's parlor, he had never seen more of Miss Burchill than to meet her at table, where she never spoke unless directly addressed, or to pass her in the village street, when she returned his graceful bow by a modest and brief salutation. Indeed, when he came to Mrs. Burchill's she seemed a mere child, a little school-girl, whom, if he should notice at all, it would be in a fatherly manner; but the

little school-girl had been as coy of appearing in his presence save when occasion demanded as was now the tall and graceful maiden she had so rapidly become. It was her firmness of tone which had most attracted his attention, and now as he looked at her without fear of being perceived—she was directing all her attention to her plate—he was surprised to find himself mentally delineating from her features—from the poise of her stately head—from his remembrance of her voice, of her kindly speech to her grandfather, a character so firm and frank and generous that it excited his admiration. He smiled as he caught himself in his task, and thought when, having finished his breakfast, he left the table, “What would Helen say if she knew to what my morning cogitations have been tending?”

And then he smiled again as he felt how little cause for fear Helen would have, even if she did know, for never was heart more firmly caught in beauty’s toils than that of poor, doomed Gerald Thurston.

CHAPTER V.

A most stylish equipage was in waiting at the depot for Miss Brower, and her trepidation when, having descended from the train she knew not which direction to pursue, was quickly allayed by the appearance of a servant in livery, who seemed to single her out by intuition. Ascertaining that she was Miss Brower, he informed her that Mr. Tillotson's carriage was in waiting.

She entered it, and adjusted herself to the soft white cushions with a delightful sense of rest. This luxury seemed to her to be her right; she remembered when a very little girl riding with her father through the streets of Boston in just such a handsome turnout, and she put up a little grateful sigh that she was about to be permitted, for a brief time at least, the enjoyment of those things which her heart so craved.

The carriage bowled along the handsomest of the city streets, and Helen was in an ecstasy of admiration; she thought of the little village of Eastbury, which she had left as a prison from which she had been released, and not even the remembrance of the true, faithful heart

there waiting for her had power to brighten the gloomy colors with which her imagination painted the obscure New England village.

The house before which the carriage stopped surprised her a little by its size and somewhat old-fashioned exterior; evidently it had not youth of which to boast, but it had a commodiousness and elegance of structure quite wanting in some of its newer neighbors. Within there reigned also an old-fashioned but substantial magnificence; indeed, a stranger would be refreshingly impressed by the sense of comfort rather than style that everywhere met one. Modern appointments where they did not secure ease were quite ignored, while old-fashioned furniture, and an old-fashioned arrangement of the same where such conduced to comfort, were in prominent use.

With her natural innate refinement, Helen understood and appreciated the delicacy that had her shown immediately to her room with a request that she should rest after her journey before meeting the family. There was a maid, however, in attendance, and a very tempting repast was brought to her, but she was too delightfully excited to partake of the delicacies, or to sleep when, having removed her traveling dress, she threw herself upon the bed; still she closed her eyes and tried to rest, for she knew how indispensable is repose to keep wrinkles away from the face.

She had shaken out her clustering curls, and now, as

she threw her arms up and crossed them over her head, her engagement ring came into sharp contact with her temple. With an impatient exclamation she flung her arms down and sat up in the bed. The maid, supposing the young lady would sleep, had left the room. She twisted the gemmed circlet about her finger, pulled it half way off, then thrust it back, again twisted it about her finger, and finally drew it off.

“They might not be so interested in me,” she said to herself, “if they thought I was already engaged to be married, and it won’t hurt Gerald to leave off his ring a little while; he’ll never know, of course, that I did such a thing.”

She arose, slipped the ring into her pocketbook, and returned to bed, where, after a little while, the fatigue of the journey did produce a light slumber.

She was awakened by the maid, who came to tell her that the family were anxious to welcome her if she was sufficiently rested.

The whole family were assembled to receive her; but Mr. Tillotson, whom she remembered, having seen him frequently when a child, met her on the very threshold of the parlor and folded her in his arms with an embrace so like that which her own father had been wont to give, that the tears sprang to her eyes. He half carried, half led her, forward to his wife and daughters; by them she was received with equal warmth and in a few moments Miss Brower was as much at

home as if she were in the poor little faded parlor in Eastbury.

Mrs. Tillotson and her daughters were equally handsome women—women to whom the wealth and culture of preceding generations had given a truly noble air.

The daughters were some three or four years older than Helen, and with a delightful assumption of seniority they at once began to treat her as if she were a much younger and a very much petted sister. They were charmed by her beauty, and by those sweet and gentle manners which none knew how to assume with more bewitching effect than the little New England lady. Mrs. Tillotson also, a true matron, and one whose large heart went charitably forth to every one, was irresistibly attracted to this interesting orphan in her mourning attire.

So Helen found herself at once the petted guest of a delightful home circle, and at dinner, at which there was only one stranger present—a distinguished looking middle-aged gentleman who had been introduced to her as Mr. Phillips—her vivacious spirits, skillfully tempered, however, by her wonted assumption of modesty, won more and more the warm regard of the family; even the fine eyes of Mr. Phillips turned frequently to her with undisguised admiration, and Helen's vanity was abundantly fed by such flattering notice.

The blushes caused by her own vain consciousness had not ceased to burn upon her cheeks when the ladies

returned to the parlor, leaving the gentlemen to their coffee and cigars; and Mary Tillotson, the elder of the sisters, clasping Helen's sylph-like waist, said, warmly:

"I feel as if we had lost much in not knowing you before. Papa often spoke of you and as often regretted that circumstances which he could not control prevented your visiting us; now, however, we must make up for lost time by endeavoring to win your affection as rapidly as you are winning ours. Must we not, Annette?" addressing her sister, who, accompanied by Mrs. Tillotson, was advancing to them.

Annette, for answer, kissed Helen's cheek, and Miss Tillotson continued:

"On account of your mourning, we must forego the pleasure of your company to large assemblies, but apart from that there will be much to amuse and interest you. You know that Annette and I are to be married on the same day, just two months from to-morrow; but the weddings are to be very quiet; we are all so averse to much display; and directly after we are going West for a few weeks. When we return we shall form our plans for the future; by that time, however, you shall have some opportunity to know and, I trust, to love us."

The parlor door at that moment opened, and Mr. Tillotson, accompanied by Mr. Phillips, entered. What was there about Mr. Phillips, especially about his straight, dignified and graceful carriage, which seemed so strangely familiar to Helen? The same inexplicable

familiarity had impressed her on his introduction to her, but in a less degree, and she was puzzled and annoyed by her efforts to explain it to herself. Mr. Phillips, however, was approaching for the purpose of speaking to her, and as Mr. Morgan and Mr. Scotfeld, the two suitors of the Misses Tillotson, were announced, Helen was left for a few moments to the respectful attentions of Mr. Phillips.

Nothing could be more flattering than the manner with which he addressed her, the graceful adroitness with which he drew out her conversational ability, and the skill with which he himself conversed. She was flattered, charmed, and sorry when they were interrupted for the purpose of introducing her to the two young men.

The hours of that evening went far too rapidly for the fair guest, and it was with a head dizzy with gratified vanity that she entered her room to retire.

She would not dismiss the maid at once, as she wanted to do and might have done without any detriment to her night toilet—having been obliged to wait upon herself since her father's reverse in fortune—lest the woman might infer that she was not accustomed to such attendance. So she patiently bore the tedium of Jennie's ministrations and was busy with her own whirling thoughts the while.

When at length she was alone she said to herself:

“I promised Gerald to write to him the very first

night of my stay here, and I suppose I must keep my word, for there is nothing he detests like broken promises and untruths. Thank heaven, I haven't to write to Barbara; she gave me a week."

She went to her trunk and took out the little traveling case well supplied with writing materials—Gerald's gift to her before her departure—and dashed off a few hurried lines in which she made much of her fatigue, a great deal of the kindness of the Tillotsons, but not one word of Mr. Phillips. It ended with—

"Your own Helen."

Then Miss Brower went to bed, and almost instantly to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS BALK had determined to remain with Mrs. Burchill, some secret reason of her own overmastering her fear of being made an object of ridicule through the little, odd, old man; and Mrs. Burchill having changed Barbara's seat at table to one quite removed from the old gentleman, that lady seemed pacified.

Poor old Burchill, knowing that the change was owing to him, felt constrained and as if he were placed on his very best behavior, in consequence of which he strove to maintain a dignity in the presence of Miss Balk, that was almost as ludicrous as had been his former unfortunate attempt at politeness. Frequently a smile curved the lips of Mildred, and a look of mirthful appreciation shone in her eyes as she watched the strange pair, and frequently Thurston was compelled to hide under an absorbing attention to his plate his disposition to laugh outright.

On the third evening of Miss Balk's sojourn in the house Gerald found a letter by his plate when he came into supper. Barbara watched him as he seized it and seemed to read eagerly the superscription. Without opening it he put it into his breast, but his face brightened.

“ May I ask if that letter is from New York ? ”

To Gerald's surprise it was Barbara's deep, unfeminine voice addressing him from the end of the table.

“ By the post-mark, I think it is.” And he bent to his plate as if he were voraciously hungry.

“ May I ask that, if it is from New York, you will tell me how Miss Brower is and what she says about *me* ? ”

It was Barbara's voice again, and Barbara's black eyes were turned in an awful look on Gerald's face.

There was another who was looking at Gerald—Mildred, who had lifted her head suddenly at the sound of Miss Brower's name, and whose clear, gray eyes looked as if they would pierce him through. But no one saw the look, for it only lasted an instant.

Thurston's brow clouded. “ If the letter should be from Miss Brower, and if it should contain any message for you, you shall certainly receive such; but I presume whatever Miss Brower has to say to you will be conveyed in a letter to yourself.”

“ Not necessarily,” said Barbara, dryly. “ When people are lovers, it's irksome to write to a third party.”

“ Confound the woman! Does she mean to parade our affairs before these people ? ” thought Gerald. But he restrained the somewhat angry retort which rose to his lips, and continued his supper.

In his room he tore open the letter and read with a pang of disappointment its meagre contents; they

seemed so cold to one of his impassioned temperament, and despite the excuse which he sought to make for them by believing all that Helen said of her fatigue, there was a strange, anxious tugging at his heart-strings.

Miss Balk was waiting for him when he descended—waiting in the very passage through which he must go to leave the house. He could not help starting when he saw her, and she smiled scornfully when she perceived the start.

“Miss Brower has said nothing about you, Miss Balk,” said Gerald quickly, and attempting to pass her as he spoke. She placed herself before him.

“Think again, Mr. Thurston; has she not even desired to be remembered to her *dear Barbara*?” The painful slowness of her speech and the sarcasm in the latter part of it, set Gerald’s teeth on edge.

“I fear, madam,” he said, more sharply than he had ever spoken to a woman in his life, “if I remain longer in your presence I shall forget the courtesy which is due to your sex. I have already told you that Miss Brower made no mention of you.”

He made another attempt to pass her and she, without moving aside, simply gathered her skimp dress up so that he might squeeze through if he wished, and she gave him such a look as he went that Gerald was willing to aver it produced nightmare when he went to bed.

He said to himself, as he hurried down the street:

“By Jove! what a devil she is! I don’t wonder that

poor little Helen's life was miserable. What on earth could induce Mr. Brower to have such a woman about his daughter? But, Providence willing, when Helen and I are married, Barbara Balk shall never set foot across *our* threshold."

His soliloquy was suddenly ended at the corner of the street, by almost knocking against Mildred and her grandfather. Gerald had been walking rapidly, and he had turned the corner so quickly as to be almost unable to stop a collision between himself and the pair who arm-in-arm were also about turning the corner. The three laughed at the awkward *contretemps*, but the little old grandfather's mirth rang out loudest and longest.

"Oh, Mr. Thurston," said he, "if I didn't know your courage so well I'd say you were running away from the old maid beyond at the house."

Gerald laughed more heartily than before, for the funny old man had so exactly hit the truth.

But Mildred, though laughing and brightly blushing at the same time, said gently:

"Ah, grandfather, we must not say ill of people behind their backs; and perhaps poor Miss Balk, if we knew her better, would have more to claim our compassion than to excite our mirth."

The candor and sincerity of her tones, her charming simplicity of manner, attracted the young man as he had been attracted a couple of mornings before when

he heard her speak, and he looked at her very earnestly for a moment. Their eyes met; she withdrew hers, blushing more than she had yet done, and he turned away with a strange, indescribable feeling in his heart; a vague fear that Helen's character was wanting in the candor and simplicity which seemed to distinguish this young girl.

Grandfather Burchill was saying:

"God bless you, Milly! it's the kind word you have for every one; and perhaps you're right about this queer creature. Maybe it's trouble that makes her so odd. Good-morning, Mr. Thurston," as Gerald was raising his hat in adieu.

Mildred was unusually silent during the remainder of the homeward walk; but her grandfather, owing to his unusual cogitations, did not seem to notice it, and when they arrived at the house Miss Balk was standing in her erect, rigid way on the piazza.

Miss Burchill had conceived a violent aversion for her mother's new boarder, which, do what she could to subdue, only increased with every sight of the spare, masculine-looking form, and now to avoid a direct meeting with Miss Balk, she made some excuse to her grandfather and went through the little garden to the rear entrance of the house.

The old man stood in the path where Mildred had left him, looking as if he were engaged in some very earnest mental debate—a debate that seemed to concern

the rigid figure on the piazza, for he frequently looked in that direction. At length, as if he had made his decision, and one quite to his satisfaction, he began pulling the flowers here and there, wherever the brightest colors or the largest size attracted him, until he had a very large bouquet, and with this proudly held before him he sought Miss Balk.

“Ma’am, I hope you’ll accept it as a peace offering.”

He looked so ridiculous, little and round and chubby as he was, and so far below Barbara, owing to his own diminutive size and her attitude above him, that even Mrs. Burchill, who saw them from the window of the dining-room, could not help laughing. Mildred, at that instant joining her mother, saw also, and while she too laughed, she watched with somewhat anxious curiosity the effect of her grandfather’s action. For a moment it seemed as if Miss Balk would dash away the proffered gift, her forehead gathered into such an ominous scowl; but perhaps something in the childlike simplicity of the old man touched her, for after a hasty glance as if to assure herself that she was not observed, she took the flowers and with a curt “Thank you!” turned into the house.

The next morning at breakfast there was the same style and size of a bouquet beside Miss Balk’s plate, and that lady slightly flushed when she saw it, but she did not push it away; neither did she look across to the little old man, who had confidently expected at least a glance of gratitude.

CHAPTER VII.

NEVER was there more to turn the head of a vain young beauty than the allurements with which circumstances had conspired to surround Miss Brower. Everything that could minister to a taste as exquisite as was her own, and everything that could pander to her inordinate love of luxury, was in this new and delightful life with the Tillotsons, and though debarred from mingling in large assemblies, there was, as Miss Tillotson had said, so much besides to interest and amuse her, that Helen did not feel as if she had any deprivation. Every day there was a visit to some place of interest, or a delightful drive through the charming suburbs of the city, or a very entertaining visit to the house of some friend; then there were always agreeable guests to meet, and the beautiful young orphan continued to receive her full meed of admiration; even the servants were loud in praise of the gentle, soft-spoken young creature, who, while she held her own in assumptions that were likely to make them think that she was not unaccustomed to her present grandeur, was at the same time careful to give no unnecessary trouble.

Mr. Phillips, however, was the one who most ministered to her vanity and love of admiration. Though

thirty years her senior, he had preserved all the grace of his early manhood—a grace which, heightened now by the dignity of mature age, at once distinguished him wherever he appeared. His interest in Helen seemed to increase as the days went on, and the young girl, gratified by an attention which was so flattering to one of her nature, and dazzled by thoughts of his wealth, which she had ample evidence to know was immense, succumbed to the influence of her vain and fickle heart; so that it came to be conceded to Mr. Phillips his right to constitute himself Miss Brower's attendant upon every occasion, and more than one private conversation regarding the matter was held by Mr. and Mrs. Til-
lotson.

“I am not false to Gerald,” Helen said, indignantly, to herself one morning, when, with Gerald's newly-received letter open upon her lap, her conscience reproached her more sharply than usual. “Mr. Phillips has not yet proposed,” she continued, “and I don't know that he will ever do such a thing, at least to me,”—in her secret heart she knew that he had been very near it the evening before,—“and it is no harm for me to enjoy myself now; I am only here six weeks, and in a few more I shall have to go back to Eastbury and Barbara Balk, and all the other disagreeable things. Dear me! what harm can it be if I do flirt for a little while? and after Gerald and I are married I'll tell him all about it, and he'll forgive me then. Poor Gerald!

how he loves me," and she took up and kissed the letter in which the ardent young fellow had poured forth his feelings so passionately. "He complains here," she soliloquized again, "of the meagre contents of my letters. Well, I must contrive to say a little more to him."

But, notwithstanding her resolution, she wrote very little more in her next letter than she had been accustomed to write; and as usual she did not say one word of Mr. Phillips. Though she had written regularly to Gerald every week, she had not once mentioned Mr. Phillips' name. She had interlarded her letters with verbose accounts of Mr. Morgan and Mr. Scotfeld, the betrothed of the Misses Tillotson, and of other transient guests of the Tillotsons, but of him of whom in common mercy to her lover she should have written, she said not a word. And so careful was she to guard against the superscription on her letters to Gerald being seen, that she detained them until the very issue of the mail from the house, lest accident should reveal to any of the Tillotsons the fact that she had a masculine correspondent.

Of her letters to Miss Balk, she was not so careful; Indeed, she had more than once sent the Tillotson ladies into paroxysms of mirth by her description of Barbara's oddities, and according to the promise extorted from her by Miss Balk, she wrote every fortnight to that lady. At first her letters had been saucy and independent, with a vein of spiteful thanks for her release from such



“You divine what it is, do you not?”

grim censorship; but after that they became more respectful, and even assumed what to another might have seemed a tone of regard. Barbara, however, was not imposed upon by the change; she pursed up her lips and said to herself, as she read a second time Helen's last letter, "I wonder what game the minx is playing? She's up to something, or she'd never write like that to me. I said I wouldn't molest her while she's making this visit, even if it should take up a year, nor shall I; but when it's ended——"

Her thin lips came together with a snap, and her eyes looked savagely at the reflection of her own repulsive face in the glass opposite.

Almost at the same moment, in Mr. Tillotson's parlor, Mr. Phillips was bending over Helen's chair, and saying in low, thrilling tones:

"Mr. Tillotson has promised to accord me an interview to-night concerning you, Miss Brower; in your orphanage I look upon him as your protector, and on the conclusion of that interview I shall seek you to say something which has trembled on my lips almost since the first evening I had the happiness of meeting you. You divine what it is, do you not?"

He bent so low that his breath fanned her forehead; but she, shrinking from him, almost cowered in her chair, while a hot and painful blush suffused her face and shone even on her neck through its filmy covering of white lace.

Regarding her agitation but as a result of the modesty with which he credited her, and that made her so charming in his eyes, he bent lower still and said, with an exquisite blending of respect and tenderness in his tones:

"I shall not further disturb you, Miss Brower, by pressing for your answer now; the subject has come too suddenly upon you, I see; but when I have concluded my interview with Mr. Tillotson, I shall seek you. Farewell for a brief space, Helen."

It was the first time he had addressed her by her Christian name, and it made her heart palpitate with sickening speed.

He sought Mr. Tillotson, and immediately withdrew with that gentleman to the library.

"In my impetuosity," he began, as soon as the door was closed upon them and they were seated, "I spoke to Miss Brower, to prepare her for my proposal, but the subject seemed to agitate her so much that I deferred it, according to my first intention, until I should have had my interview with you."

Tillotson did not reply; instead he covered his face with his hands and seemed to be in grave and even painful thought, while Phillips regarded him with an earnest and somewhat anxious look. At length he looked up.

"Phillips," said he, laying his hand on the other's arm, "my hesitation surprises and perhaps displeases

you, does it not? But you will understand and believe me when I say that I have all a father's concern for that young creature who has come to us. Her father was one of my dearest friends; but apart from that, her orphan state, her youth, her limited means, all appeal to my instincts as a man and a father, and I have the same interest in her welfare that I would wish any friend of mine to have in that of my daughters were they similarly placed. The accident that threw you and me together three years ago abroad discovered at that time sufficient of your character to win as warm an esteem as perhaps I have ever given to any one outside of my family, and all that I have seen of you subsequently has but increased that regard." Phillips bowed. Tillotson continued: "That regard was enhanced by the confidence with which you honored me. But"—there was a moment's hesitation, during which the speaker's eyes looked searchingly into those of the listener—"are you sure that this marriage which you desire will be for your happiness? Forgive me if I speak very plain. Are you sure that it is because you *love* Miss Brower you would marry her, and not because you would complete the revenge you have already partially taken?"

"I shall be as frank with you, Tillotson, as you have been with me. It is to gratify both passions—love and revenge. I love Miss Brower as I have loved but once before in my life, and I would cut off, by marrying her,

the last hope which may dwell in a proud and obdurate heart."

He began to be strangely agitated. Tillotson also became agitated. "Phillips," said he, "have you weighed all the consequences of this unhappy passion, revenge; and have you been even just to the object you would so ruthlessly crush? Have you never gone back to the years that preceded that unhappy event, and been touched and softened by *their* story of affection? Perhaps it needs but one word from you to break down even now the wall between you."

Phillips rose from his chair.

"Tillotson, would you counsel *me* to such degradation. Where is *your* spirit as a man and a father?"

"But," said Tillotson, rising also, and speaking quickly, "there may have been no opportunity for the other party to make overtures, your whereabouts being unknown."

Phillips answered, fiercely:

"Rodney is always a means of communication. Speak no more, Tillotson, on this subject; it wrings my heart, and that already has sustained more shocks than it long will be capable of enduring."

He looked frightfully pale as he spoke, and pressed his hand to his side.

"My decision is made," he continued. "I shall marry Miss Brower if she will accept my hand and if you, her sole protector, do not interpose," with a smile

and a bow, "and I shall, even before the marriage rite takes place, make my will in her favor; everything shall be left to her except a few trifling bequests."

Tillotson replied:

"Your fortune is so large, will it not be sufficient to settle a munificent income upon Helen, and reserve the bulk of your wealth for other purposes? You may repent when too late, perhaps, this decision you are so passionately insisting upon."

"Never!" and there was a fierceness in the tones that betrayed an implacable spirit. "And further, I shall annex a condition to the will that my widow, should my wife become such, is to possess my wealth only so long as she refuses to aid by one cent that"—he hesitated as if seeking a word—"other party. The moment that she gives to that person a tittle of my wealth, that moment she ceases to own my fortune. It will revert in that case to your family."

"My family! Phillips, are you mad? My family does not need it."

"Let them endow some charitable institution with it if they find it superfluous, but on no pretext is my wife to possess a dollar of it should she disobey my wishes. Do we fully understand each other now? and have I your permission to press my suit for Miss Brower's hand? I do not think that I shall make an unkind husband."

"Nor I, Phillips; and believe me that there is no

one to whom I would give her more willingly—no one to whom I would give more willingly Mary or Annette; only, that for your own sake I wish this unpleasantness of the past were wiped out.”

“Since it cannot be, we shall forget it. And now, Tillotson, do you think that Helen—Miss Brower—should she favor my suit, could be induced to have the ceremony performed soon—in fact, on the very day of that of your own daughters? You know my reason for wishing to hasten it; indeed, my premonitions are very sharp sometimes,” and again he pressed his hand upon his side.

Tillotson shook his head.

“I fear to give you any opinion upon that point, it is such a delicate one, particularly at this time when she is mourning the loss of her father; he is not dead six months yet.”

“And yet I *must* press the matter,” said Phillips, “if only to secure my own peace of mind.”

He placed his arm through that of Tillotson, and together they left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

MILDRED BURCHILL came home from school one afternoon in a much more thoughtful mood than usual, and with strange abstraction, instead of immediately seeking her mother, as it was her habit to do, she entered the parlor and, seating herself on the first convenient chair, covered her face with her hand and appeared to be deeply thinking. She had evidently supposed the room to be unoccupied, and a first cursory sight would justify her supposition; but a second and more careful look would have revealed Barbara Balk's skimpily-dressed form in a corner reading, and almost entirely hidden by the half of the curtained casement, which, opening into the room, stood as a sort of shield before her. She looked up from her book on the entrance of Mildred, and watched the latter with the glance of a basilisk.

Suddenly there were quick little steps on the piazza, and a fat, round, freckled face surmounted by an uncombed mass of thick red hair, thrust itself in at the casement beside which Miss Balk sat. She started up in some dismay, and the dirty, tattered child to whom the freckled face belonged, equally frightened at finding a live being where she expected nothing but the open

casement, fell inward, striking against Barbara's toes, and putting a rent in Barbara's silk dress.

"You filthy, nasty little brat! how dare you come into any person's house that way?" And Barbara's shrill and angry tones would have given fear to a stouter heart than the poor, little, dirty mite, who had picked herself up and was saying, with her fists in her eyes:

"Please, ma'am, I didn't go for to do it. I——"

But Miss Balk's wrath would suffer no explanation.

"Don't tell me that, you good-for-nothing imp. Don't——" This time she was interrupted by Mildred, who, comprehending the scene at last, darted forward and caught the child's hand.

"Were you looking for me, Maggie?"

"Yes, ma'am,"—sobbing as if her heart would break,—*"Mammy sent me for you. Poppy's home from the factory, and there's awful times there. Come right away, please, Miss Burchill,"* and both little chubby, dirty fists were clinging to the friendly hand of Mildred.

"You see, Miss Balk, the child really meant no harm. She saw me through the casement, I suppose, and thought it the surest and quickest way to reach me. I am sorry she has torn your dress, but you will surely not continue to hold anger against my little friend for that."

All this from Miss Burchill while her frank eyes looked full into the flaming eyes before her.

“Your *friends*,”—with a sarcastic accent on the latter word—“I presume, are too sure of their privileges to care about *my* anger.”

This from Barbara, while, with one hand covering the rent made in her dress, she stalked from the room stiffer and grimmer than ever.

Mildred was indignant and more annoyed than she cared to acknowledge even to herself. The emphasis on the word *friends*, and the hidden meaning evidently implied in the whole sentence, made her feel as if she had received some bitter insult; but for the sake of her mother, who seemed really foolishly afraid of offending Miss Balk, she would endure it. Besides, two months of Barbara’s stay had expired, and in four months more her sojourn with them would end.

Having informed her mother of the summons which had come for her, Miss Burchill accompanied little Maggie to a part of the village which comprised the poor, and, in many cases, dirty abodes of the poorest people of Eastbury; people who lived from hand to mouth, and who, to purchase brief oblivion of their condition, frequently spent on liquor that which should have given food to their families. The dwellings in many cases were rudest shanties, and in some of these a broken window, or a door half off its hinges, or the neglected state of the little plot of ground surrounding, told the story of drunken indolence.

Into one of these shanties Maggie conducted Mildred,

though it was evident from Mildred's manner the place was not unfamiliar to her. As she entered a woman with a baby in her arms started up from a low seat in a corner of the room. Though poor and plain, well-nigh to the last degree of poverty, the apartment was very clean, and the poor, hollow-eyed creature who met the girl bore evidence of neatness in her dress.

"May God reward you, Miss Burchill, for coming. I'm in sore distress this time."

The sleeping baby in her arms was stirring, and she paused to kiss and soothe it.

Miss Burchill waited with that expression of tender sympathy in her face which is of itself more sometimes than a gift would be.

"Mr. Robinson, you see, has been cutting down the wages again, and Dick got into one of his tantrums, and said he'd stand it no longer. He said he was flesh and blood, and not a stone to be stepped on that way; that he wouldn't have stood it so long only for Mr. Thurston. And so he's been stirring up the other hands with his speeches, and yesterday Mr. Robinson discharged Dick, and sure we'll starve all together now——"

She paused to let her tears have way, and they trickled on the face of the sleeping babe.

"That was all when he had the drop in," she resumed. "If he had kept sober he wouldn't have gone to the extremes he did; but it was the drink that fired him to

it, and he's so reckless since his discharge that he thinks of nothing but making the hands agree to a strike, and I'm afraid he'll do it, for they're to have a meeting to-night at Raney's Hall, and perhaps it will all bring bad work."

She stopped again to soothe the half-awakened baby, and Mildred gravely reflected on what she had heard.

"I sent for you, Miss Burchill, thinking that, as Mr. Thurston boarded in your house, you might speak a word to him for Dick," and the tearful eyes were fastened with resistless entreaty on the face of her listener. "Everybody knows that Mr. Thurston is everything with Mr. Robinson, and I think Dick would be content to go back even at the reduction, for he knows we'll starve if he don't; and he cried himself last night when he was sober and we were all talking the matter over together. Will you speak for him, Miss Burchill?"

"Certainly, if you think it will do any good. But the fact that Mr. Thurston boards with us gives me no right to ask a favor from him; indeed, I seldom speak to him."

"No matter for that, dear; but ask him."

And Mildred, on her homeward way, was full of the thought as to how she would approach Mr. Thurston. After supper she found, or rather made, an opportunity. Waylaying him in the little passage, much as Miss Balk had done on a former occasion, she asked his permission

to speak to him, then she led the way to the parlor, secretly thankful that Miss Balk was on the piazza, where, if she saw them, as she must do through the open casement should she turn her head, she was at least far enough away not to hear their conversation. In a low tone, and in her own brief, simple, candid way she stated the facts.

Gerald looked very grave.

“This man for whom you are interceding,” he said, in as low a tone as she had used, “is really a very formidable character to us in the factory just now, because of the influence which he exerts over his fellow-workmen both by his generous disposition and his talents as a speaker; almost without education, he can stir men up by his uncouth eloquence as many cultivated orators are unable to do, and for these reasons it is safer to have him out of the factory. I allow that the reduction in the men’s wages was hard; God knows, their pay was scanty enough before; but their master is a close one, and beggars, you know, can’t be choosers.”

There had succeeded to the look of pity which came into his eyes when he spoke of the men’s wages a half-playful expression, but it only lasted an instant; he was saying, as gravely as before:

“You have given me valuable information, Miss Burchill. I felt that the hands would take some concerted action, but I did not know how soon nor where would be their place of meeting. ‘Raney’s Hall,’ you

say? I shall be there; and now you may assure this poor Mrs. Hogan that I shall do all in my power to have her husband reinstated."

"Thank you," and one fair slender hand was extended to him, while the glow of pleasure on Miss Burchill's face showed how earnest was her gratitude.

They turned to leave the room, and were met by Miss Balk's spare form standing in the open casement.

Gerald could have shot himself for starting as he did; but, to the shame of his manhood be it spoken, the sight of Barbara always gave him a shiver, and Mildred was very angry with herself for coloring so violently; but Barbara, with a haughty, scornful glance at both, as if they were unworthy of any but her contemptuous attention, passed into the room, on her way to the centre-table, where were kept the choice books of the household.

CHAPTER IX.

PHILLIPS sought Helen at the close of his interview with Tillotson; she felt his presence even before she saw him, and, stopping suddenly in some vivacious remark to Annette, she blushed and trembled visibly. But the amused Annette only smiled the more significantly; she fancied she understood Miss Brower's emotion, she had impulsively repeated Mr. Phillips' last remarks to herself,—and though during the whole evening the young lady thought Helen strangely agitated, she was not disposed to question or criticise her emotion. Through Helen's mind wild thoughts of immediate flight were speeding, but Phillips had reached her, and, while Annette gracefully withdrew, he was saying:

“Miss Brower, will you accord me a few minutes now in the library?”

She bowed assent,—she could not speak if she had tried—and she turned and followed him.

In the library he drew forward for her the chair so recently occupied by Tillotson, and standing before her told in a rapid, impassioned way his love, and his desire for a speedy marriage.

His vehemence produced a strange awe in her; she

shivered as if with an ague, and her eyes, which were fastened upon his face, had the terrified stare of some hunted animal; he perceived it and became concerned and remorseful. Bending to her, he took her hand; it was like marble in his hot grasp.

“Forgive me, Helen. I have frightened you by my impetuosity; but when a man’s heart is stirred as mine is, his feelings too easily carry him away. And I have suffered so keenly in the past; one day perhaps you shall know, and then you will understand and pity me.”

A low cry broke from her blanched lips, and she snatched her hand from him and covered her face with it, for not quite three months ago had not Gerald Thurston spoken those very words to her?

Phillips, utterly unsuspecting, and only chiding himself for being too abrupt with one so sensitive, was saying, in an agony of remorse:

“My darling, I shall say no more to cause you such agitation; only look up, and tell me that you forgive me; in my haste I forgot how delicately sensitive you are.”

He had drawn her hand from her face, and, waiting a moment as if to be sure that her agitation would take no worse form than the intense pallor that rather added to than detracted from her beauty, he resumed:

“I have been proceeding, Helen, like an insane man. I do not yet know that you will accept my hand, and yet I have built my hopes alone on the encouragement

which you have given me. Your manner certainly evinced that my attentions were agreeable to you; were they not, you would have made me understand that fact before this late moment. As an honorable woman you *must* have done so."

The last impulse to act honorably on Helen's part fled at these words. How could she tell that stern and yet impetuous man that she who had permitted and received his attentions was all the time the betrothed of another? She could not meet the scorn and wrath which she felt would be sure to follow such an avowal; so she thrust back the earnest, manly face that rose to upbraid her, and sat up rigidly to hear the remainder of that passionate declaration.

Phillips continued:

"Once before, Helen, have I loved, but not with the strength of affection which I seem to have for you. Of course, you are aware that I am a widower,—a childless widower." There was a slightly perceptible accent of bitterness on the next to the last word, but the fair listener did not perceive it. "Though so much older than you as to be more father than husband, I shall be both, Helen. All my wealth shall be yours, and your life shall be replete with every gratification that my love or my means can procure for you. Do you accept, Helen? Will you be mine?" His eyes were burning into hers, his hot, hard-drawn breath fanning her face.

For answer she placed her hands in his, and then she bowed her head, and sought desperately to shut out the vision of Thurston's face.

Phillips circled her with his arm.

"My darling, my own! And now there is but one thing more,—the naming of the day. You will allow our marriage to take place with that of Mary and Annette?"

She sprang from him.

"I could not! Oh please don't ask me that, I could not marry so soon; indeed I could not."

A flood of tears accompanied her last words.

"My poor, affectionate child," said Phillips, "you hesitate, I suppose, on account of the recent death of your father. I do not blame you; indeed, it but enhances my regard for you. But, my little Helen, I am too impetuous a lover to defer for very long my claim to you even in consideration to your filial affection, and I think your father, could he speak from his grave, would not object to see his little girl provided for even so soon as six months after his death. Since, however, you feel it so keenly, I shall give you the grace of an additional three months, allowing nine months to elapse from the death of your father. Will that suffice?"

Her tears ceased.

"Thank you, Mr. Phillips; that will do."

In her mind were all sorts of whirling thoughts about this three months' respite. Something might happen,

something *must* happen, to prevent the consummation of her horrible treachery to Gerald.

He led her from the library directly to Mrs. Tillotson, and in an inimitably quiet and graceful way made the good lady acquainted with the relation which he now held to her young guest. Then, leaving the latter to be folded in an embrace so tender that tears of remorse for the deceitful part she was acting sprang to her eyes, he sought Mr. Tillotson. Mrs Tillotson said to the fair girl she was holding so closely to her breast:

“I congratulate you, my dear girl. You will have a husband worthy of you, and one who will place you in the position you are so well fitted to adorn.”

The last words quieted Helen's emotion, for they brought up the old, fondly-indulged-in visions of wealth, elegant dress, fashionable society, and all the luxuries which her inconstant heart so craved. She looked up from the bosom where she had buried her face, and that still retained traces of her recent remorseful tears, and assumed a manner so expressive of happiness, and at the same time so modest, that during the rest of the evening, when congratulations from the different members of the family warmly poured upon her, and Phillips, after he had announced his engagement to Tillotson, seemed unable to remain a moment from her side, she charmed more than ever those who had taken her so unsuspectingly to their hearts.

Later however, in her own room, there came fiercely

enough to her the torturing thoughts which flattering attention and music and mirth had kept at bay so successfully during the earlier part of the evening; regardless now of what Jennie might think at being dismissed so soon, she sent her from the room, and cried more unhappy and bitter tears than she had shed in her whole life.

“Mr. Phillips forced me into this engagement,” she said aloud, in answer to the sharp upbraiding of her conscience, “and I shall not be false to Gerald. I’ll run away; I’ll do something before I’ll marry Mr. Phillips. Poor Gerald! I’ll write to him this very night, and he’ll think I’m wonderfully good to write again so soon; it is only two days since I wrote to him before. But then my letters have been shamefully short. Well, I’ll make up for them by writing him a good long loving one now.”

She rose to get her writing materials, pausing on the way to draw from her bosom a slender chain to which was attached a small gold heart; a light touch opened it and revealed the manly face of Thurston.

She pressed it to her lips, and when she was seated at her desk she unclasped the chain from her neck, and placed the open locket where she could look at it from time to time while she wrote.

And all this she told to Gerald in her letter,—how his picture looked up to her while she penned passionate words of affection which she would have sworn came

from her heart, and page after page was filled with a nervous rapidity that astonished herself. But the bulky packet, when at last it lay sealed and addressed, was as innocent of Mr. Phillips' name as had been all her previous letters.

CHAPTER X.

GERALD THURSTON received Miss Brower's loving effusion as he was about to go forth to Raney's Hall.

The meeting was not to be held for three-quarters of an hour yet; he could give ten minutes to the letter of his betrothed and have ample time to reach the place of assembly. With trembling haste he tore it open, and read with delighted surprise a letter such as Helen never before had written to him. His eyes brightened, his cheeks flushed with pleasure, and he pressed the tinted and perfumed sheets to his lips. Then, placing the packet in his breast, he hurried out. Even his gait was more elastic owing to the reception of that letter, and his voice, as he saluted Grandfather Burchill, who was sitting on the little front porch, had a heartier ring in it; meeting Miss Balk on the street, he did not seem to experience quite the thrill which any unexpected sight of her always caused him. He raised his hat, and even went so far as to salute her more kindly than he had done for a fortnight past; but Barbara was as grim and obdurate as ever, and she passed him with scarcely a response to his salutation, while Gerald, caring little,

now that he held in Helen's letter an assurance that, as he loved so was he loved in return, continued his way, humming to himself a gay love tune.

"Raney's Hall" was a great barn-like place just within the precincts of the poorest part of Eastbury. The lower portion served as a low bar-room; the upper part was a long, low, wide apartment, hired in turn for balls occasionally given by the poor but festively-inclined residents of the village, and the political meetings that aroused alternately the boisterous spirit of opposing political factions.

Now as Gerald approached he could see the entrance surrounded by the factory operatives; in but a few instances had they changed their working-dress, or assumed a semblance of cleanliness even in the matter of washed faces or combed hair. Dirty, gaunt, and tattered, their heavy faces and watery eyes bore evidence that another agency than a close-fisted employer had to do with their poverty.

They made respectful way for Gerald, and while a few faces looked threatening, the majority brightened as he kindly greeted them.

"You are to have a meeting, I understand," he said to one of the men, "and Dick Hogan is to make a speech."

"We are, sir," the man answered, civilly, while at the same time a look of surprise not unmixed with fear came into his face.

Gerald saw the expression and correctly interpreted it.

“Do not fear, my man,” he said, in a hearty tone. “I am not here acting under Mr. Robinson’s orders. I am here on my own account, to help you, my poor fellows, if I can consistently with right and justice.”

“God bless you, sir; you were always our friend since you came to the factory.” And the man lifted his ragged cap.

There was a movement of the groups as if some signal to enter had been given, and they hurried up the well-worn wooden stair to the low wide room above, now dimly lighted. Gerald followed, keeping beside the man to whom he had spoken, but at the door of the room he found himself repulsed.

“I am sorry,” said the operative who acted as door-keeper, “but you are not one of us, Mr. Thurston, and Dick’s orders were strict to let no one in but ourselves.”

“Is Dick here?” asked Gerald.

“He is, sir.”

“Tell him that I desire admission.”

The message brought the man termed Dick to the door. Shabbily dressed and unkempt as he was, his massive form and uncommonly handsome features would attract even a casual observer. He confronted Gerald respectfully, but with something of a haughty surprise.

"Will you refuse me entrance, Dick?"

"How did you know of this meeting?" was the question asked instead of the reply Gerald expected.

"Never mind that," said Thurston, "but tell me at once whether you will admit me."

The large and somewhat fierce-looking black eyes of the man looked sharply into Gerald's face, and the firm set mouth twitched a little.

Thurston bent forward and placed his hand on his arm.

"Tell me, Dick, who before this has stood between the hands and a determination to crush them by bringing in foreign labor? Who for the past two years has done all in his power to maintain the wages even at their present rate?"

Hogan became humbled and abashed. "You, Mr. Thurston," he said, hanging his head.

Gerald continued:

"I came here to-night as much in your interest as in that of my employer, to use what influence I may possess in the cause of right and justice. You are sober now, Dick, and so are enabled to take an impartial view of things. Had you been sober the day before yesterday you would not have provoked Mr. Robinson to discharge you, and had you not continued to drink after that, you would not have gone to such an extremity as this meeting proves you to have done."

Hogan still hung his head, and the other hands, who

had grouped themselves near, curious and anxious to know the subject of the conference, seeing their leader apparently cowed, lost much of their own bold demeanor.

Gerald still continued:

“You had a purpose in stirring up the men so soon. You would have a strike go into operation to-morrow if possible.”

Hogan raised his head:

“I will be honest with you, Mr. Thurston—that’s my intention. I know that Mr. Robinson will lose a good many thousand dollars if the contract isn’t finished in time, and so I’d have the hands strike while the way is clear before them. He’s keeping us on starvation wages long enough; it’s time we’d keep some of the dollars from his rich purse.”

“Ah, my man! you are only looking at one side of the case. Grant that you succeed in your effort to make Mr. Robinson so great a loser, what after that? An increase of wages for the operatives? No, but a sweeping discharge, and an immediate introduction of foreign labor. Robinson is rich enough to stand a loss of many thousand dollars, and rich enough to compass his ends, be they the punishment of his employees or the introduction of foreign workmen. No, my poor fellow, your reasoning is entirely opposed to your own interest and to that of the other factory-hands. Think! the winter is near. What will these hundred poor fellows do with their helpless families? Where will they go, or how

will they procure employment? Better continue their work even at the present poor rate of pay; but I think I can guarantee, if you will abolish this meeting and try rather to prevent a strike than to organize one, that you yourself shall be reinstated in the factory, and on the completion of this contract Mr. Robinson shall be so impressed with the magnanimity of the operatives in giving up their determination to strike when circumstances were so much in their favor that he will, of his own accord, raise the wages."

Hogan shook his head:

"You don't know your man, Mr. Thurston, if you think he'd be touched by the like of that. We've worked for him many a day before you came here, and the way he screwed us to the last penny made it a wonder more than once that we didn't rise up and murder him where he stood. Since you came you seemed to stand between us, somehow, as if you had a secret power over him some way."

Gerald knew to what he owed his secret power over Mr. Robinson, though he did not enlighten the poor fellow. He owed it to the fact that his business ability brought more money to the miserly factory-owner than the latter could gain by his own management of the work.

Hogan continued, losing much of his humble air as he proceeded:

"And I wouldn't put it past him to have sent you

down here with a soft speech in your mouth in order to turn us against our purpose."

Gerald replied, a little indignantly:

"Were my soft speeches in the past in his or in your interest? You say that I seem to have stood between you and his hard course, and you acknowledge that your condition has been something better since I came to the factory; why accuse me now of contrary conduct? And this, like your other reasoning, is opposed to the judgment of your rational mind. You know that Mr. Robinson is from home; that were he in Eastbury, and knew of this meeting, he could have stopped it as a riotous and disorderly proceeding, for half of these fellows are now so full of liquor that it needs but one of your firebrand speeches to set them fighting with each other if they can find no one else to fall upon. No, Dick, I came down here, as I told you before, of my own accord, to help you if I can, consistently with right and justice. Now, what will you do? continue your preparation for a strike, and have the suffering of these poor fellows and their families upon you, for suffer they certainly will if you win them to this step?"

Again the firm set mouth twitched, and the fierce-looking eyes seemed to pierce Gerald's countenance.

"I must, Mr. Thurston; the boys expect me to speak, but I'll tell them all you said, and let them choose their own course."

He turned away, giving, as he did so, a low order to the door-keeper to admit Gerald.

Hogan kept his word with Thurston. He mounted the rude platform to speak, and while the rugged begrimed faces, wearing a strange aspect in the dim light of the hall, looked up to him with intense expectation, no one waited with such keen and anxious interest for the first words which should fall from his lips as Thurston. Assigned a place very near the platform, he riveted his gaze on the speaker with a magnetism that more than once compelled the latter to return the steady and searching look.

Hogan—uncouth, illiterate as he was—was a natural orator; there was even a grace and dignity about his attitude, as he stood for a moment before beginning his speech, which surprised Gerald, and won from him involuntary admiration.

He gave calmly, in his own way, the substance of the interview which had just occurred between Mr. Thurston and himself; but in the next breath he burst into an impassioned account of the wrongs which had brought about the present meeting. Tones and gestures were on fire from his own impassioned feelings, and, while his language was the simplest and homeliest, every word, because of the voice and manner of the speaker, struck with resistless influence the hearts of the uncouth fellows whom he addressed. Even Thurston bent a little to the sway of that powerful oratory, but he

paled as he saw how Hogan's stirring words were riveting the fierce, sullen determination which had been visible from the first on the faces of many. Something must be done, and done quickly, if he would save his employer's interest, and save the unhappy men themselves from an act which must result disastrously.

Waiting only to have the last word leave Hogan's lips, he sprang upon the platform and begged a hearing.

Surprise kept every one silent for a second, then discordant cries broke out:

"We won't hear you; you'll take the part of Mr. Robinson against us; we'll have our rights!" mingled with,—

"Yes, we will hear you; you were always for us! Speak on!"

Hogan himself demanded order, and asked them to listen to Thurston.

Gerald spoke, in his simple manly way detailing the evils their course would bring upon themselves, the little hope of redress which a strike would gain, and ended by pledging himself to obtain some increase in their wages if they would abandon their present attempt.

He waited for some one to reply, but instead, a discussion ensued between the men. Many were for accepting Gerald's terms at once, and as many more refused to do so, saying that Thurston would be unable to keep his pledge, and that so good an opportunity for a strike might not occur again.

In the midst of the discussion the door of the hall was forced violently open, and a number of constables entered. One produced a warrant for the arrest of Dick Hogan.

“What for?” said Hogan, coming forward, and with a look in his eyes from which the man shrank.

“For inciting these men to be disturbers of the peace. It’s on Mr. Robinson’s orders the warrant was issued.”

“Mr. Robinson, eh!” and for a moment Hogan’s face grew white with suppressed passion. “Well, come on then, and take me if you can.”

He braced himself against the wall, and flourished a large knife which he drew from his breast.

The constable drew his pistol.

“Put up your pistol,” shouted Thurston, who had flung himself in front of Hogan and was struggling with the officers to keep back the angry and desperate men. But his order came too late; the officer, maddened by the fierce and unexpected resistance of Hogan, and apprehensive also of violence to himself from the other factory operatives, yielded to his first savage impulse and fired. The ball passed not to the man for whom it was intended, but to Thurston, who had interposed himself as a shield between the officer and his intended victim. Without a word or a groan he fell; and Hogan, struck with awe and remorse, dropped his knife and stood like one paralyzed above the bleeding form at his feet.

The confusion became consternation. Gerald was thought to be dead, he lay so white and motionless, and, while a hurried order was given by one of the constables for a physician, his companions proceeded to arrest Hogan. He made no resistance, seeming like one dazed and keeping his eyes on the wounded man. The officer who had fired the pistol placed himself under arrest.

The messenger who had rushed hatless for the nearest doctor speedily returned with one, who at once pronounced the wound serious. Messengers were dispatched for a conveyance, and Thurston, still insensible, was removed to it, and, accompanied by the doctor, was slowly driven to his boarding-house.

CHAPTER XI.

THE wedding of the Tillotson girls took place in the quiet, unostentatious manner in which they chose to conduct everything. The guests were few but they were well selected, and in the enjoyment of it all Helen forgot for a time her own unhappy state of mind. All her efforts—and they had been many—were vain to stifle the reproaches and the terror of her conscience for the promise she had given Mr. Phillips. Gerald's face rose before her in a way that would not be put down, and his voice rang in her ears whenever she was alone, until she was often constrained to seek some member of the family in order to dispel the delusion. Once, yielding to an impulse of her better nature, she actually began a letter to him in which she intended to make a frank confession, assure him of her deep love for him, and beg him to come immediately for her, and remove her from influences which had been so baneful to her. But the thought of the consternation which such a proceeding must cause in the Tillotson family, the disgust which it must arouse for herself, paralyzed her hand; then she thought of flight, and was almost casting about her for some means of secretly accom-

plishing it, when Mr. Phillips' immense wealth and the dazzling prospects which that wealth held out to her, made her again pause and waver. At last she determined on complete forgetfulness, and for this purpose she took the locket that contained Gerald's picture from her bosom. It seemed to stick to her hand; she burst into a passion of tears, and ended by returning it to its place. On this day of the wedding, however, in the consciousness of her beauty, which was never more brilliant, and which made her as much an object of attraction as the two handsome brides, and the recipient of attentions the most delicate and flattering from Mr. Phillips, she was enabled to keep her wild thoughts completely at bay. Indeed, not a little to her own surprise, Gerald's face did not once interpose in its accustomed way, and when the reception which followed the marriage ceremony was over, and the brides had gone on their Western tour, and Helen had a moment to slip from the guests still below, she found herself so happy from the adulation that had ministered to her vanity that she determined to write an immediate account of the day's festivities to Gerald. True, he had not answered her last letter, but his reply might have miscarried, and in any event she knew that her letters could not be too frequent. So she gave him glowing details of the double wedding, appended a description of her own appearance, and ended with the warmest protestations of love for himself; but as in the case of

every other letter, so was this one innocent of the name of Phillips.

On the day succeeding the wedding she was in so much demand by Mr. and Mrs. Tillotson, who had become quite fondly attached to her, and by Phillips himself, who seemed restless and anxious out of her presence, that she had little time for solitude. Gerald had not replied to any of her recent letters, and while she wondered, and even somewhat worried, interior voices were saying to her that his silence might be very fortunate. In this seeming neglect of his would be found a sufficient excuse for the breaking of her engagement to him, and for her marriage to Phillips; and as every day brought acknowledgments of the latter's warm regard for her in the shape of costly presents, the voice of her conscience was further stilled, and her treachery to her lover nearer completion. Though continuing to write every fortnight to Barbara Balk, she made not a single allusion to Gerald, and that lady in her caustic replies was equally silent about him.

"But a month remains," whispered Mr. Phillips to Helen, one day that he came to lunch with the Tillotsons; and as that morning she had received from him an exquisite set of jewels, she could do nothing but assent to his whisper by a smile and a blush. He pressed her hand, and they entered the dining-room together. But what a sight met them.

Mrs Tillotson in a passion of tears hung on her hus-

band's neck, while he, holding an open telegram, looked the picture of grief and horror.

"Read, Phillips," he said, extending the telegram, "and see how suddenly grief has overtaken us."

Phillips read:

"Accident to the train—Annette and Mary hurt, but not seriously; still it is better that you should come on.

"CHARLES SCOTFELD."

"I have given orders for our immediate departure," said Mr. Tillotson, for, though the telegram states 'not seriously'; I have sad misgivings."

At this instant a servant entered, bearing another dispatch. It was torn open with feverish haste.

"There is no cause for alarm. Both ladies are very slightly hurt, and both request me to state that there is no necessity to subject you to the fatigue of a journey to them.

"C. SCOTFELD."

"Thank God!" said Mr. Phillips. But Mrs. Tillotson had sustained a shock which nothing but the prospect of going immediately to her daughters seemed to lighten. She must see them, and Tillotson, both to gratify her and to satisfy his own yearning to behold for himself the condition of his children, determined to follow out his order for speedy departure.

“And Helen,” he said, “shall accompany us.”

“No,” said Phillips. “I have another plan; spare me a few minutes, Tillotson, to submit it to you.”

They withdrew to the library, leaving Helen white and terror-stricken, but her paleness and terror were attributed to the sad news received, and not to her secret premonitions of what Phillips’ plan might be.

She had little time, however, to yield to her wild thoughts for Mrs. Tillotson had drawn her to her, and was weeping upon her neck tears of mingled sorrow and joy,—joy that the last news had been so favorable; and in a few moments the two men returned, and immediately approached her.

Phillips’ plan was disclosed to her. It was that her marriage to him should take place that very day, before Mr. and Mrs Tillotson’s departure. It could be a very quiet ceremony, performed in the house of the Tillotsons, which should remain the home of the newly-wedded couple for the few days prior to a journey abroad.

The plan met Tillotson’s warm approbation, and Mrs. Tillotson kissing and straining the pallid girl to her, whispered—

“Consent, dearest; it is best for you.”

But Helen gasped, while Gerald’s face rose up in its old persistent way.

“You gave me three months: there is a month yet.”

Her terror was plainly visible and utterly inexplicable to the three who saw it, even on the supposition,

which was in the mind of each, that her time of mourning for her father had not expired.

Phillips answered with a sternness that Helen had never heard in his tones before, and that somewhat terrified her.

“If the thought of a hastier union with me than you had expected is so insupportable, Helen, it is better that you should ask to be released from your engagement; or if there be some secret reason why—” he bent towards her; she was forced to look at him, and she cowered before the expression of his eyes—“you should continue to crave delay; it is your duty to tell it.”

For one whirling moment the last impulse of her better nature rose up. “Ask the release that he suggests,” whispered the still small voice; but her weak nature recoiled from the indignation and scorn with which she felt she would be visited; indeed, she was terrified now, and she had but one desire—to do anything that would regain Phillips’ wonted regard.

“I have no reason; I was only thinking of papa.” Her tears burst forth, and she threw herself sobbing on Mrs. Tillotson’s breast. It was the last protest of her stifled conscience against her falsehood and her cruel wrong to Gerald.

But Phillips never was so much in love with her as at that moment; her grief, deeming it as he did the outburst of a devoted filial affection, enhanced the charm of her character, and he became impatient to

win at once her consent to an immediate marriage. Waiting only for the partial calm of her agitation, he pressed with delicate courtesy for her answer. Powerless now to resist the toils she had woven about herself, she assented, and he withdrew with Tillotson to make immediate preparations for a hasty ceremony, while Mrs. Tillotson accompanied Helen to her room.

CHAPTER XII.

THURSTON'S return wounded and insensible as he still remained, had put Mrs. Burchill's little household into a state of great consternation and excitement; indeed, the only persons who seemed to have any self-possession were Mildred and Miss Balk. The former quietly gave the orders relative to Gerald's immediate care which her astounded and affrighted mother seemed too bewildered to give, and Miss Balk, without vouchsafing a single question to any one, watched while they carried the wounded man through the little passage and up the short stair with something very like a look of triumph in her eyes.

A surgeon who at the request of the doctor in attendance had been summoned now arrived, and both found Miss Burchill of invaluable assistance; she was so noiseless and yet so quick in her movements and she seemed to divine by singular intuition where her aid would be most effectual.

The ball, that had lodged in the region of the heart, could not be extracted that night, and the utmost that could be done for the sufferer was to endeavor to bring

him to consciousness, and to allay the pain he might then suffer.

Robinson, owing to the thought of Mildred, had been summoned, and he came at once. He was ushered to Gerald's bedside, and his hard, lean, angular face as it bent over the wounded man, might well justify the reputation which the factory hands gave him of closeness. Even his form, tall and exceedingly spare, looked as if it were a living witness of its owner's rigid parsimony.

He turned after a brief survey of Gerald to ask some question of the doctor, and his eyes fell upon Mildred. She had been waiting upon the physician, and she now stood for an instant where the light of the lamp fell fully upon her. She looked very attractive in her simple, neat-fitting, dark dress, and Robinson's cold eyes glittered as they rested upon her. But he turned in a moment to ask what were the chances of Gerald's recovery.

"Slight," was the reply of the doctor, "unless the ball can be extracted to-morrow."

The lean, angular face looked anxious.

"Might he die to-night?"

"No, Mr. Robinson; he will not die to-night unless some very unexpected change should take place."

"Then I shall not remain, and if any change for the worse should happen, send for me at once. I must speak to him upon business matters before he dies."

The last words betraying as they did the intense selfishness of the speaker, caused Miss Burchill to look at him. Their eyes met,—those keen, greenish-looking eyes, so keen and peculiar in their color that they gave a most singular expression to his face, and her large, bright, frank eyes. To her dying day she never forgot the effect produced upon her by that look. It was as if a current from some charnel chamber had swept across her, while at the same time she experienced an instantaneous conviction that this man was in some unpleasant way to cross her future path. Leaving the room, she was glad to find her mother ready to escort the factory owner to the door, and she fled to her own room to chide herself for her silly sensations and to reason herself back to her wonted calm. Her strange emotions seemed the more inexplicable that, though never having spoken to the wealthy factory owner, nor seen him so closely before, still his form and face were not unfamiliar to her.

At the door Robinson had paused to say to Mrs. Burchill.

“Who is that young lady upstairs?”

“My daughter, sir,” she replied with maternal pride.

“Umph! What does she do? what trade does she follow?”

“She goes to school still, sir; but one of the selectmen has promised to have her put into the school as teacher next fall.”

“Umph!” louder, and more emphatic than before. “Tell Miss Burchill, when she is ready to apply for that position, to come to me.”

He was gone before Mrs. Burchill could recover her astonishment sufficiently to thank him. She hurried, however, to Mildred, and told what had passed; but, instead of that young woman receiving the communication with the same surprised pleasure that her mother had done, she turned pale, and was silent.

“Well, you *are* a strange girl,” said Mrs. Burchill. “Here you have been anxious all spring lest Mr. Marsh’s influence wouldn’t be enough to get you a teacher’s place, and now, when Mr. Robinson, the richest man in Eastbury, says of his own accord for you to come to him when you’re ready for the place, you haven’t a word to say.”

“Perhaps I am strange,” was the low reply, “but, somehow, I’d rather get the place without Mr. Robinson’s help. However, we’ll see when I have passed my examination. And now you go to Mr. Thurston, mother; the doctors expect him to recover consciousness presently, and if he does, you may be needed.”

Thurston did recover consciousness, but it was only to rave in fever delirium of the events in which he had taken part so recently.

The ball was extracted successfully, but for days his life hung in the balance, and despite the united efforts of the two physicians, and the most tender nursing on

the part of Mrs. Burchill and her daughter, there seemed to be but slight hope of his recovery.

For Miss Balk, she never even inquired about him, and to little old Grandfather Burchill's frequent regrets and anxious hopes for the young man's recovery, all of which were expressed without any reserve every time he had a hearer, she never vouchsafed a reply. The only interest that she took in Gerald's concerns was to go every day to the post-office and inquire for letters for him. There were letters alone from Helen,—Miss Balk easily recognized the superscription,—and these she put carefully away into her own old-fashioned trunk.

Gerald's ravings became at last of Helen, and he fancied that Mildred was she. With a tenderness that frequently brought tears to the eyes of his young nurse, he repeated declarations of his love for Helen; Helen who, in those same moments, was delightfully receiving the attentions of another. In this way Mildred learned enough to know that there was an engagement of marriage between him and Miss Brower, and enough to feel that the latter was the object of an unusually strong and tender attachment. In her womanly sympathy it seemed but right that Miss Brower should be summoned. What if he should die, and she who held his heart not near him! She shuddered, and she went at once, when relieved of her watch by the bedside, to seek Miss Balk.

That lady was cold and grim as ever, but colder and grimmer when apprised of the object of Miss Burchill's

visit. She declined all interference with Miss Brower's affairs.

"But this will not be interfering," said Mildred, a little hotly, being provoked at the woman's total want of feeling. "It will be simply your duty to apprise Miss Brower of Mr. Thurston's serious condition, or give me her address, and I will write to her."

Miss Balk laughed—a dry, hoarse, short laugh that made one long to shut one's ears against it—and turned away. Mildred, indignant, followed.

"Am I to understand, Miss Balk, that you positively refuse to do this act of common humanity?"

"You are to understand anything you like," was the grim response, and Miss Balk stalked past Miss Burchill and out into the garden.

If Mildred disliked her mother's strange boarder before, and through Christian feelings had struggled to conquer that dislike, she had an uncontrollable aversion for her henceforth, and nothing but the most stern sense of her duty as a Christian, and her love for her mother, who still entertained her first strange fear of displeasing Barbara, prevented her from showing that aversion whenever they met.

She performed her duties in the sick-room with an assiduity all the more tender from the apprehension that Gerald would die without once seeing her who seemed so dear to him. She knew Miss Brower by sight, and she had been impressed for the time by her

beauty as everybody else was wont to be, but further than that she had never given a thought to the young woman; now, however, her thoughts were frequently of Miss Brower, and as more and more there came to be disclosed the depths of that love which seemed to be the centre of the sick man's being, she grew impatient and angry with Miss Brower herself, questioning in her own mind why the latter did not write to some one in the house about Gerald; since they were engaged lovers, surely she must wonder at his silence.

The delirium of the fever ceased at last, and though weak as an infant, and still needing the most tender care, he was pronounced out of danger. Mildred resigned her place at his bedside, now that he knew those about him, and Robinson, who had sent every day to learn Gerald's condition, came himself when apprised of the change in the patient.

He was met on the porch by the physician, who begged him not to enter the sick-room, as absolute quiet was necessary to prevent a relapse, and the sight of the factory owner might bring the thoughts and anxieties of the business to the patient's mind.

Robinson was disconcerted; there had been so many hitches in his business during Gerald's sickness, and now there were important affairs which must have immediate decision, and which decision needed Gerald's judgment. The factory operatives had gone sullenly to work. Hogan was still in prison waiting a trial,—on what

charge he was at a loss himself to tell, but which the wealthy factory owner's influence had easily secured.

While Robinson stood in the little porch looking with displeased perplexity into the doctor's face, a poor, attenuated, wretchedly clad woman, carrying a puny baby, and having by the hand a little emaciated girl, entered the garden. She came forward slowly and hesitatingly, casting anxious glances about her, as if she were desirous of meeting some one to address before she reached the house. She saw no one, however, and at last looking directly in front of her, her eyes rested on Robinson's tall, spare form. She became intensely agitated; her limbs shook convulsively, and her hollow cheeks flushed; grasping more tightly the child whose hand she held, she quickened her pace.

"Mr. Robinson!"

The factory owner, whose back was to the woman, turned as if he was shot at the sound of that unnatural voice, it was so deep and heartbroken. The doctor also looked with no little surprise.

"For the love of heaven, release my husband from prison; they say your word can do it; we're starving; see my children and me, and Dick will die where he is. Release him, Mr. Robinson, and we'll contrive to go away,—all of us; we'll beg our way to some place far from here. I tried to see you every day since Dick's arrest, but the servants wouldn't let me near you."

Robinson's tall form seemed to become taller, he

towered so above the poor, little, wan creature, and his hard face seemed to resolve itself into many more hard lines than already composed it, while his glittering eyes became like steel in their metallic expression.

“Your husband, woman, shall be visited with the full penalty of the law.”

His tones were as cold as his face was.

For a second the woman continued to look at him without speaking,—a look as if every vital force within her was gathering to hurl some desperate anathema at him; it was like the last, last effort of the wounded wild beast.

“May the curse of the heartbroken light upon you! May you be haunted day and night by the presence of the dead! May—” But there was a hand upon her mouth, and an arm around her neck.

It was Mildred, white and startled. From the open window of the parlor, whither she had paused for a moment, she heard the first part of the curse, and obeying the impulse which prompted her to prevent its completion she had sprung to Mrs. Hogan’s side, hardly conscious until then that there were two other observers of her sudden act.

The physician, more appalled at the woman’s appearance and her fierce utterance than at the denunciation itself, shrank a little, but Robinson never moved; only an almost imperceptible paleness overspread his features.

"Come into the house," whispered Miss Burchill, removing her hand from the woman's mouth; "you are not yourself now."

"I am not. May God help me! Oh, may God forgive me for the curse."

A flood of tears relieved her, and Mildred, taking the puny baby from her, again whispered to her to come into the house. She obeyed mechanically, the tears still gushing from her eyes, and then the two men looked at each other.

The doctor knew sufficient of Robinson's reputation for hardness to make him scarcely surprised at the scene he had witnessed, but he was not prepared for the change in the factory owner's countenance. The imperceptible paleness had increased, until now his face was livid.

"Surely, Mr. Robinson, you have not been affected by that poor creature's mad words?"

"I, sir?" and Robinson drew himself up, and attempted to assume a careless, contemptuous tone, but his voice was husky, and trembled slightly. He laughed, however, and wiping the perspiration from his face said, abruptly:

"How soon can I see Mr. Thurston?"

"In a day or two, if you promise not to permit him to speak of business."

"My seeing him on such terms would be of no use. I must see him on business."

The doctor was not a little disgusted.

“Then, Mr. Robinson, we must shut you out of the sick-room for a month yet.”

“He has the same careful nursing, I suppose—Miss Burchill constantly at his bedside?”

The doctor was again surprised; not so much at the interest betrayed in the quality of Thurston's nursing—the man's selfish anxiety for his own interest would make him betray that—as at the tone in which the last part of his question was spoken. To the observing doctor it seemed to indicate a more than passing interest in Miss Burchill.

“No,” he answered. “Now that Mr. Thurston has passed through the most imminent crisis, she asked to be relieved from the attendance upon him, and at my suggestion a professional nurse was summoned, who arrived from Boston last night.”

The factory owner desired no further information, and he turned away with a short “Good-morning!” while the physician went up to his patient.

Within the house Mildred was soothing and ministering to poor Mrs. Hogan and her little ones. Nourishment such as they had not tasted for days was tenderly given to them, and, somewhat refreshed and quieted by that gentle kindness, the poor creature was relieving herself by detailing her troubles.

“Why didn't you come here before?” asked Miss Burchill. “We would have given you food, at least.”

“I know it, dear,” she said, “but I couldn't come

and Mr. Thurston's death before me; for everybody said he would die, and I knowing and Dick knowing that it was trying to save him Mr. Thurston got his wound. Oh! how I prayed for him to get well; and Dick in his prison isn't like what he was, owing to the dread on him of Mr. Thurston's death. I thought he'd be savage, pent up there between the stone walls and without us, and knowing we didn't have a bite in the house, but it was on Mr. Thurston most of his thoughts were, and he was so subdued and brooding-like that it went through my heart. I thought the sight of myself and the children *might* touch Mr. Robinson. Sure, it's not much that Dick's in jail for, anyhow, and every one told me that it all rested with Mr. Robinson. I tried to see him, but he has servants as hard as himself. They said they'd set the dogs on me if I came there again. If I wasn't beside myself this morning, I wouldn't have cursed him."

Her face blanched, and she rocked herself to and fro for a few minutes without speaking. Then she whispered, still rocking herself—

"I'm afraid the curse will light on him. I spoke it from my heart when I said it, and——"

"Why, this is ridiculous," interrupted Mildred. "You only imagine all this because you are weak from suffering."

"No, no. Let me tell you; it will ease my mind. From a child I have heard stories how some member

of our family in each generation had the power to make such a curse as I gave him this morning, come true. The dead whose spirits are not at rest do haunt the cursed person."

She seemed like some wraith herself, with her emaciated form, her hollow cheeks, transparent skin, and large, lustrous eyes, and but for the strong common sense that Mildred possessed, and that made her see in all this but the effect of a most ignorant and superstitious imagination, she might have been quite strongly impressed; as it was, she made another effort to remove Mrs. Hogan's thoughts from the unpleasant subject. But the woman would not be quieted; she must relieve her mind.

"I have heard stories," she continued, "where a griping landlord at home was cursed by my grandmother, just such a curse as I gave, when he left her homeless on the roadside. Years after, when he was a tottering old man, he came to the far part of the country where she lived to ask her to remove it; his health and his strength had gone, he was so haunted. She tried to remove it; she forgave him, and she prayed for him, but he had to bear it to the end. And what, oh! what, if the curse I gave this morning should come true!" Her very lips blanched. "I don't wish it to come true. Sure, if Mr. Robinson *killed* Dick I wouldn't be wicked enough to curse him; but if he's haunted, and it's through me!" She stopped, as if beside herself with

terror, and it required Miss Burchill's most soothing and at the same time firm, efforts to restore the poor creature to any degree of calm. But the woman's own exhaustion came to her aid, and she was induced at last to lie down for a little and leave her children, one of whom was sleeping, to the tender care of the young girl.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUCH preparations as could be effected hastily were made for Miss Brower's wedding. The servants received hurried orders, and for a couple of hours the house seemed to be full of bustle. In the midst of it Helen was summoned to the library to meet Mr. Phillips and Mr. Tillotson. There was also another gentleman present whom she had never seen before.

She knew that this was not a summons to the marriage ceremony, as that would take place a little later in the parlor; but, for all, she was white and cold as an icicle.

Tillotson, with true paternal tenderness, hastened to her.

"My dearest Helen, your presence here is necessary to complete some little detail of business which Mr. Phillips desires to have attended to before your marriage. For that purpose it is necessary to present to you Mr. Miller, Mr. Phillips' lawyer."

The strange gentleman, who was standing beside a table spread with legal documents, bowed, a courtesy which Helen returned as calmly as her violent agitation would allow her to do.

Tillotson resumed:

“Mr Phillips’ will has just been drawn up, and it is entirely in your favor. There is but one condition annexed to it, and to that condition he desires your written assent. That you may read and understand the condition before you sign such an assent is the object of your present summons.”

Mr. Miller unfolded a paper and presented it to her. She pretended to read it, but there was a film upon her eyes, and when the film seemed to clear a great blur appeared upon the paper. She could not distinguish a letter of the penmanship, and ashamed to declare the truth lest her singular emotion must arouse again, as it had done already that morning, Mr. Phillips’ surprise and displeasure, she feigned to have read it all.

“Are you quite satisfied to sign?” asked Tillotson. She bowed her head.

“Quite, Helen?” interposed Phillips; “you have no scruple, no hesitation?”

Again she assented by a motion of her head; her very voice seemed to be frozen within her.

The pen was placed in her hand by Miller, and she signed tremblingly,

“Helen Brower.”

An hour after and the marriage ceremony was performed. In making the responses it seemed to her as if it were not she who made them, but something strangely apart from herself, and when Phillips caught her to him, calling her his bride and kissing her

passionately, she lay passive and cold in his arms. But the ardor of his own affection prevented him from attributing her strange demeanor to anything but her modesty, which so charmed him. And as the Tillotsons were to depart after partaking of a collation to which all were immediately summoned, there was little opportunity for either him or Helen to yield exclusively to singular emotions.

The wedding feast was over, the Tillotsons gone, and Miller was still in the library looking over legal documents, Phillips and his bride were in the great state parlor, from which the latter was about to ascend to change her dress for a drive. As her responses had seemed to her a couple of hours before, so now did her own individuality seem singular and utterly unfamiliar. She wondered at her strange self-possession, more like the apathy that sometimes precedes severe illness, and she mentally asked herself if ever again she would be that Helen who seemed to have gone so suddenly and so completely.

She had turned from the parlor to go to her room, and she had reached the door when her husband called her. He extended his arms. She came towards them slowly, as if leaden weights were attached to her feet, but she reached them at last, and he caught her to him passionately.

"You seem cold, my little Helen," he said, looking down into her face as her head lay back upon his arm,

“but this day’s sudden excitement has taxed you too much. To-morrow you will be different; then shall I find myself, ‘even as I love, loved am I.’ ”

A slender gold chain glistened above the ruffle at her throat; his finger came into playful contact with it, and in a moment the locket that was attached to it sprang into sight.

She started up, seized the locket with both hands.

“Nay, my little Helen; wives must have no secrets from their husbands, and I must see if it is *my* picture you guard so precious.”

With difficulty she repressed a shriek, while she clasped the locket with all her strength.

Veiling under a playfulness, that he was now far from feeling, his determination to see the interior of the locket, he gently, but with a firmness of touch against which her strength availed nothing, disengaged it from her grasp, and while he continued to hold her firmly with one hand, with the other he pressed the spring. It flew open, and revealed Gerald Thurston’s face.

With a cry so savage that it rang in her ears for days after, he threw her from him, breaking in the violence of the act the chain of the locket, and leaving the latter still open in his hand.

“What is this man to you?” he thundered. “Speak, woman! and tell how you have come to wear *his* picture in your bosom!”

Paralyzed from terror, she was lying as she had fallen

when he threw her—prone on the floor. He lifted her to the divan.

“Speak!” he thundered again.

He seemed transformed, the veins in his forehead swollen from rage, his eyes flaming at her.

Terror forced the truth from her:

“I was engaged to him.”

“Engaged to him when you married me?”

“Yes.”

“Are you woman or devil? Go!” He pointed to the door; then, without waiting for her to obey, he strode to the bell and pulled it violently.

She dragged herself up from the divan; her only desire was to hide herself from this infuriated man,—to hide from herself if she could,—and she tried to hurry from the room; but before she could succeed there was a heavy fall behind her, a hoarse, unnatural cry, and she turned to find Phillips in a convulsion on the floor. Her screams hastened the steps of the terrified servant, who was already hastening to answer the bell, and brought Miller from the library.

The struggling man was tenderly borne to bed, physicians summoned, all by Miller’s directions, who, in the absence of any one else, assumed control, and who gave his orders in a firm, self-possessed manner that did much to quiet the excited servants and to restore something like calm to the bride herself. She had been sobbing hysterically, with neither power nor desire to

move from the spot where her husband had fallen, not even to follow him to the apartment to which he had been borne. Miller, seeing that, deemed it best that she should go to her own room. He induced her to accompany her maid, promising to summon her as soon as there was any change in her husband's condition. In her room, Jennie, the kind-hearted maid, could think of no better remedy for her hysterical young mistress than a sleeping cordial, and this she offered, urging respectfully its salutary effects. Helen took it mechanically, and almost at once fell into a deep slumber.

Phillips, under the united efforts of two skilful physicians, recovered from his spasms, and after an hour or more of deathlike unconsciousness, rallied sufficiently to attempt to speak; but he could make only unintelligible sounds. It was to Miller he turned, and to him he seemed to wish to make some communication.

The lawyer interpreted it to mean the presence of Mrs. Phillips, and he mentioned her name, saying he would send for her. But the sick man shook his head, and again mumbled the painfully indistinct utterances. The lawyer was troubled; evidently there was some matter of moment on the patient's mind; even the physicians seemed to think that, and to think also that, unless his mind could be relieved, his ultimate recovery, of which, as it was, they entertained but slight hope, would be materially retarded. So they

assisted Miller's efforts to understand the patient, while he, grown wildly eager to make himself understood, seemed to acquire unnatural strength. He raised himself in the bed, and wrote in the air with his finger.

"Give him a pen," said Miller; "he may be able to make some character that will guide me."

The sick man's eyes brightened, and he clutched the pen filled with ink which was placed in his hand, not holding it in the customary way, but winding all his fingers about it as one who had never held a pen before might do.

The physician supported him, and the lawyer assisted his hand as it moved feebly over the paper. Great scrawly letters appeared and only the words "send for" could be deciphered. In vain Miller tried to construe some name out of the succeeding strange, trembling, twisted characters; he could make nothing of them, and, with a great hopeless sigh, Phillips fell back on his pillow and turned his face to the wall. But the lawyer would not yet give up; he thought of Phillips' friends, and conceived the idea of repeating the names of each in turn. As if the patient understood the object of the speech, at the sound of the first name, he turned to him, and his whole face brightened. But he shook his head,—shook it when Tillotson and many more names were mentioned, and the lawyer's list was almost exhausted, and the poor sufferer's eyes, fastened on the lawyer's face, were more painfully eager. As a forlorn

hope, he thought of one name,—the name of a man who was formerly Phillips' business executor. He mentioned it. There was a cry from the patient, a great glad cry, as if the shock had given power to his paralyzed tongue. He repeated twice:

“Send for him.”

And then he relapsed into utter unconsciousness, while a messenger was dispatched for the man named.

Mrs. Phillips was still heavily slumbering, with faithful Jennie watching by her bedside,—too heavily slumbering to dream even of the dread and exciting events which must forever mark that day in her life. The evening came, and still she slept, while Jennie listened to the unusual sounds which suddenly reached her from below. Everything had been so quiet, but now there was the opening and shutting of doors, and the sound of many hurried feet through the marble hall. She started up to hear more distinctly; at that moment her mistress awoke. For an instant she gazed about her in a bewildered way, then her eye fell on the broken chain that still hung from the ruffle of her dress, and raising her hand she felt the unaccustomed pressure of her wedding ring. It all came back.

“Oh, that I were dead!”

She turned her face to the pillow, and the couch shook from her sobs.

Jennie wept in sympathy, but through her tears attempted to comfort her mistress.

There was a hurried knock at the door; it was a servant sent to summon Mrs. Phillips to her husband.

She rose, motioning away the woman who would have assisted her, and, waiting only to wrap about her the shawl that had been put over while she slept, she descended to her husband. Miller met her at the door of the room and led her gently in. There seemed to be a group of men about the bed, a group that stood aside to make respectful way for her, but a group that at the same time seemed to make some strange signal to Miller. He stopped short on perceiving it, and gave a terrified look at the little figure by his side.

Then he bent to her, and said, softly,—

“Your husband is dead, Mrs. Phillips.”

“Dead” she repeated, looking at him, and then she looked at the group of men a step beyond, repeating again, in a vague way, “Dead!”

Not a heart there save one, but ached for her; she was so young, so fair, and she seemed so stunned by this great blow. One of the doctors, fearing serious consequences, hastened to her, but she seemed to be calm, and, going forward of her own accord, she stood by the great state bed on which reposed the lifeless remains of her husband.

Neither death, nor the passions that had so torn his soul prior to the dread visitation, had left one unsightly trace on his handsome features; he looked as calm as though he were but lightly slumbering. And she, his

wife, who stood looking down at him with hands locked so tightly together that the nails seemed to be cutting into the flesh, of what were her thoughts? Of him whose death lay at her door? No; but of Gerald Thurston, and with a gasping cry she threw herself forward, and fainted on the corpse.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. PHILLIPS was borne to her room, and the physicians who had sought to relieve her husband now directed their efforts to her restoration.

Miller was inditing a third telegram to Tillotson, though he did not expect any of them to be in the hand of that gentleman before a late hour the next day. And as he wrote, another man, small in stature and nervous in movement, but with a keen, intelligent face, was pacing the room. He seemed impatiently waiting an opportunity to speak, and as soon as the last word of the dispatch was penned, he began with nervous eagerness:

“ You refuse to believe then, what I have told you, in spite of all that you yourself have told me of Phillips’ extraordinary efforts to make you comprehend that he wished to see me; in spite of what I have told you of his private communication to me when I came; and in spite also of the statement of both physicians who were hurriedly summoned to be witnesses of his last desire?”

“ Understand me,” replied Miller; “ I believe it all, but only as the vagary of a man stricken down suddenly as he was; his power of speech, regained so singularly the moment he saw you, his desire to speak privately to

you, and his singular loss of speech again when you summoned the physicians to bear witness to his last wish, all only confirm me in the opinion that the man's mind was wrought upon by his disease. Even the doctors themselves lean more or less to that opinion, and, contest the will on what grounds you choose, you certainly will be defeated."

"Nevertheless, I *shall* contest it for the sake of right and justice."

"And what of Mrs. Phillips? She is so young, and poor, I believe, as regards any fortune of her own, and utterly without friends, so far as I can learn, except the Tillotsons."

Miller's face bore testimony to his sympathy.

The other man seemed neither to feel nor to approve of the sympathy.

"Mrs. Phillips!" he repeated, in a tone of disgust; "but enough of her until the case is prepared."

An answer came at last to Miller's telegrams, an answer from Tillotson, empowering and begging the lawyer to assume full charge, and to do everything that his judgment dictated as neither he nor Mrs. Tillotson could leave the bedside of their daughters, on one of whom the effect of the accident, thought to be so light at first, now threatened to prove very serious. Regarding Mrs. Phillips, she was left to her own choice, either to join the Tillotsons, return to Eastbury, or continue in her present home. Mrs. Phillips, however, was too ill

to be consulted upon any matter. The physicians said she was threatened with brain fever, and urged that every arrangement for the funeral be made in the quietest manner, that no undue excitement in the house might reach her, to arouse her to a remembrance of her recent terrible shock. So the still form below stairs was laid quietly away without even one parting look from her who had been so faithless to the living, and who was now so insensible to the dead.

Brain fever, however, did not ensue, and a week after her husband's funeral Mrs. Phillips was sufficiently recovered to reason in her own way upon the eventful turns which her life had taken.

The husband whom she had not loved was quietly in his grave, his vast fortune her own,—had she not an assurance on the day of her wedding that his latest will was in her favor,—and she herself was free as ever to love Gerald. But would Gerald continue to love her when he knew what had happened? Would all the wealth with which she intended to enrich him cover in his eyes what she had done,—he who had such love for truth and honor? Her white cheeks became whiter still, and her head began to throb. She loved him more passionately than she had ever done, and she would gladly have yielded all her suddenly acquired, and it may be added, ill-gotten wealth, to be again fortuneless Helen Brower. Her maid entered with letters for her; she grasped them tremblingly, giving a little glad

cry when she recognized Gerald's penmanship in the superscription of one: it had been so long since a letter came from him.

He could not write much, he said, being still so weak from illness that he was permitted to sit up only a brief while each day. He would not tell her until they met what had been the cause of his illness. "But oh, Helen!" the letter ran, "sharper than all my bodily suffering is the thought that you have not written to me once during my illness. Mrs. Burchill said no letters came for me. If your affection for me was such as mine is for you, my very silence during all these weeks would have brought you to me. You knew that I would not be silent unless my fingers were rendered powerless by sickness or death. But perhaps you too were ill, my darling; I cannot believe that anything else would keep you silent. But come to me now, Helen; my soul is crying for you. Come! Come!"

She sobbed over the letter, much to her maid's surprise, and yet much also to her delight, for she felt that her young mistress would be relieved by this outburst of emotion. Her mistress wanting to be alone, bade her leave the room for a little; then she kissed the letter, and put it into her bosom, where Gerald's picture used to repose.

"Yes, I will go to him," she said; "go to him at once, before he learns from any lips but mine what has happened, and when he knows how I was fascinated into

that marriage, and how true my heart was to him all the time, he will forgive me. But why need I tell him until after our marriage? Since he has not learned it yet, if I am very careful not to reveal it myself, he need not know until then, and of course he will be as eager for our marriage when we meet as he was when we parted. But Barbara Balk: what if she already knows, or if she should learn about it?"

Her eyes fell on the other letter lying in her lap. She opened it; it was an indignant missive from Barbara. What did Helen mean by omitting her accustoméd letter? Only for her promise not to molest Miss Brower for a year, she would have presented herself at the house of the Tillotsons before now.

"Perhaps you will say you were sick," the letter continued; "but an illness made up to free you from any engagement to me shall recoil with such a blow upon your own head that you'll wish you were in your coffin sooner."

Mrs. Phillips ground her teeth with suppressed rage. But, after all, the letter assured her of Miss Balk's ignorance of her marriage, and she was confident now of being able, if she returned immediately to Eastbury, to preserve secrecy on that subject until after her marriage to Gerald.

Phillips' dead face as she had seen it the first and only time rose before her as if in ghastly censure, and she shuddered visibly. In an instant, however

she had forced it back, mentally congratulating herself that she had only seen him once after his death. Did she feel that her conscience was charged with his death? Did she attribute his spasms to the shock which the discovery of her duplicity had given him? If she did, it was overpowered by her thankfulness to the fate which had made her free to wed Gerald Thurston, and she drew forward her writing materials and penned to Gerald a letter of most passionate attachment. Of course she told him of her illness, dwelling upon it in the pathetic fashion which she knew would touch his heart, and ascribing to it her long silence, though at the same time telling him of the letters which she had previously written, and to which she had received no answer. She had not thought him ill, because in that case she supposed Miss Balk would have mentioned it; she did not tell him how innocent of his name were her letters to Miss Balk. And then she assured him of her speedy return; within the week she would be in Eastbury.

To Miss Balk also, she penned an epistle detailing her illness, and promising a speedy return, in anticipation of which she wished Barbara to have the little country house that had been their home somewhat renovated.

But Mrs. Phillips was not to return to Eastbury as speedily as she wished to do. Miller, on being informed of her determination, told her of some details of busi-

ness necessary to be settled before she could be put into possession of any of the vast fortune left to her by her husband, and of the necessity of her presence in order to effect such a settlement; consequently, he advised a postponement of her return to Eastbury for the present. She knew too little of business to wonder at such a statement, and she felt too confident of her husband's arrangements in her behalf to feel the slightest alarm or doubt. She did not even divine from Mr. Miller's somewhat hesitating and uncertain manner that he was seeking to conceal from her the actual truth. Being a tender-hearted man and an affectionate father, the lawyer could not bear yet to distress Mrs. Phillips with the fact that her husband's will was about to be contested, and that she herself would have to appear in court. He suggested that some of her Eastbury friends be summoned to bear her company; but she shook her head in an artless way, assuring him that none of them could come; then he advised the presence of some of the women friends of the Tillotsons, with whom Helen had become quite well acquainted during her stay in the city; but again Mrs. Phillips shook her head, and said that she could not bear the thought of any companion just yet. She was sufficiently cared for by her maid and the housekeeper, and indeed, all the servants had shown an unexpected solicitude for her.

This she said with so touching and pretty an air, looking up into the lawyer's face with all the artlessness

of a confiding child, that he was more bound to her cause than ever, and more desirous of sparing her pain or annoyance.

The lawyer left her, and she wrote again to Gerald and Barbara. Her ready wits easily found an excuse for her unexpected detention in the accident to the Tiltson girls which had called their parents so hastily away; their hurried departure made it necessary for her to postpone her own going for the present. She was glad that she had not mentioned the accident in her last letter, for she could turn it to such good account now by pretending that it was of extremely recent date.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. PHILLIPS' last two letters reached Thurston in such quick succession—Miss Balk for some secret motive, not having appropriated them as she had done their immediate predecessors—that his reply to the first became also an answer to the second. In it he deplored the cruel necessity of her absence, but he gave so glowing an account of the beneficial effect of her letters upon his health that she cried tears of rapture as she read.

They wrote to each other every day now, and while Mrs. Phillips assumed a most touching melancholy, and even an air of feeble health before Miller, who in his office of her guardian kindly visited her every day, she had no difficulty when alone in putting out of her countenance and out of her heart every vestige of grief. Indeed, she was sometimes wildly happy at the prospect of enriching Gerald. She had now not the slightest doubt of being able to win his forgiveness, having in his letters such strong proofs of his ardent love, could she but keep her marriage to Phillips secret until she became Mrs. Thurston. Of his forgiveness in the event of telling him before the marriage she had very grave doubts.

On the plea of feeble health she refused to see a single one of the friends of the Tillotsons who called to proffer their condolence; she steadily refused to go out even for the brief drive which the physician advised for her health, because she would be expected to put on widow's weeds; and she even contemplated, when she could fix the day of her return to Eastbury, going quietly and secretly, so that she might be spared the necessity of wearing the same solemn costume. That, of course, would tell the shocking story at once to all Eastbury.

Gerald's letters began to hint at some delightful mystery. "Do you remember," one of them ran, "my telling you of a great hope which might one day be fulfilled? Well, the fulfillment seems strangely near,—so near that it takes my breath away to think of it, and then, my little Helen, all your pride shall be gratified."

Her eyes glistened and her cheeks flushed over such letters as these, and she became so impatient to return that only Mr. Miller's assurance of a very few days more being necessary to decide matters could win from her a promise to remain.

A long and affectionate letter had come from the Tillotsons, every member of the family penning some fond and sympathizing words, but announcing an indefinite postponement of their return. Annette, who had been the more severely injured by the accident, was threatened with a life paralysis of the lower limbs, and

in view of the operation advised by several leading physicians, the family had decided that they would remain with her.

Helen was answering this letter when Miller called to make his daily visit. She looked very pale from her long and close confinement, and, maintaining the grief-stricken air which she was careful to assume before entering his presence, the tender-hearted man found it most difficult to make some evidently disagreeable communication.

"My dear Mrs. Phillips," he began at length, when his kind inquiries for her health were languidly answered, "do you think you would have sufficient strength to appear in court to-morrow?"

Helen recoiled, and, startled out of her languidness, exclaimed, "In court! Why should *I* have to appear in court?"

Miller pretended to be amused:

"My dear Mrs. Phillips, one would think you had been asked to do some dreadful thing. It is only the matter of your presence in the court for a very short time. You will be treated with the most flattering respect and delicacy."

"But why must I appear there at all?" interrupted Helen, too impatient to wait for the diplomatic explanation Miller sought to make.

The lawyer coughed in order to gain a little time:

"My dear Mrs. Phillips, there is just a little trouble

about your husband's will. Some one who, in a former will, was named as Mr. Phillips' heir, is seeking to invalidate his will in your favor; but he has a poor case, a poor case," lowering his voice as if he were speaking to himself, "and it will be necessary for you to go upon the witness stand a few moments, and testify to the last words spoken to you by your husband."

Mrs. Phillips gasped.

The last words of her husband to her! They had been burned in her brain at the time, and for days after the lips which had uttered them were stilled they had rung in her ears like a knell of some fearful doom. Must she repeat those words on a witness stand,—must she depict, for the delectation of a public court, that last dreadful scene, in which her husband sank beneath the shock of her infamous duplicity? Her head reeled, and she sank helplessly back on the cushions of the sofa. Miller, thinking she had fainted, was about to ring for help, but she opened her eyes and called him before he reached the bell.

He was bending over her immediately:

"My dear Mrs. Phillips, I blame myself for telling you so abruptly; but your sensitiveness exaggerates this matter. It will really be very little; simply to show that your relations with each other were of the fondest character up to the last."

Helen shuddered.

"What if I do not appear?" she said; "what if I

consent to let this claimant, whoever the party may be, contest and win the case? I have lived without my husband's wealth; I can do so still."

Miller looked very grave:

"My dear Mrs. Phillips, such a course would be most unwise; besides, the law, in order to do justice, might compel you to appear. Preparations have been made for your testimony to be taken to-morrow, but if you feel too ill to give it, it can be deferred. However, my dear Mrs. Phillips, I would advise you, if possible, to have this unpleasant duty over at once. I do not think your presence will be required after to-morrow. May I call for you in the morning?"

Her mind was rapidly working. Did she persist in her refusal, did she even return immediately to Eastbury, such a course might entail a most unpleasant exposure of all that she wished to conceal; since, as Miller had said, the law might compel her to appear, it might then summon her from Eastbury in no pleasant manner.

She looked up and answered quickly;

"Thank you, Mr. Miller; I shall be ready in the morning." He seemed relieved, and seeing that she appeared too wearied to talk further, he took his departure.

So Mrs. Phillips had to appear in widow's weeds at last; but they were exquisitely becoming, and, even despite of an ominous dread and anxiety which had

caused her slumber during the night to be short and fitful, she felt a throb of delighted vanity as she looked at herself in the glass. Her very pallor but made her more interestingly beautiful, and her widow's cap, covering, though it did not entirely conceal, her beautiful hair, surrounded features so perfectly modelled that the gaze must indeed be dull which did not linger upon her with intense admiration. Mr. Miller brought his own carriage for her, and her maid accompanied her. As the lawyer had said, she was treated with the most delicate courtesy, assigned a private room until the very moment in which it should be necessary to give her testimony, and then she was escorted to the witness-stand by Miller himself. She was politely requested to remove her veil; she did so, and the blush that suffused her cheeks made her transcendently lovely; a buzz of admiration went through the crowded court-room, and the people jostled each other in their efforts to obtain a view of her.

Being duly sworn, she deposed to the fact of her amicable relations with her husband to the very moment of his illness. She had but left his arms to go to her room for the purpose of changing her dress, and had reached the door when she heard him fall. That was all; and all the questions and counter questions of opposing counsel elicited not one syllable of the actual truth; she had perjured herself as remorselessly as she had broken her plighted troth to Thurston. She had

been conscious while she was speaking of some bustle in her rear, of efforts being made to keep some one quiet; but just as she had finished speaking, and was about to draw her heavy crape veil over her face, some one, as if by main force, rushed in her direction,—some one who, with a single bound, seemed to clear the space immediately in front of her, and who stood with outstretched arms in passionate denunciation:

“*Helen Brower, are you my father’s widow?*” It was Gerald Thurston. Like an apparition he stood there, white as a ghost from his recent illness, but with eyes that flamed at her as Phillips’ had done in that last terrible scene. Like a flash the peculiar something about Phillips which at times had puzzled her by its strange resemblance came to her now; it bore conviction as strong as Gerald’s words, and with a wild cry, that startled anew the already wildly excited people, she fell at Gerald’s feet.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. PHILLIPS' swoon seemed so deep that it was deemed expedient to bear her home as speedily as possible; in her own room then, she opened her eyes for the first time since they had closed on their last dreadful sight of Thurston. She screamed at the horrified remembrance. The scream brought Jennie to her.

"Thank God that you have come to at last!" was the exclamation of the faithful maid; and, in the glow of her own satisfaction at the event, she proceeded to tell of Mr. Miller's alarm, his telegram to the physician, who was momentarily expected, and the excitement and concern of the whole court; the lawyer's anxiety kept him still in the house awaiting the arrival of the doctor.

"Tell him he need not wait," said Helen, sitting up in the bed; "but no; I shall see him myself."

Regardless of the expostulations or entreaties of Jennie, who feared the inadequacy of her mistress's strength for such an exertion, she rose, and hardly suffering, in her impatience, Jennie's assistance to arrange her loosened attire, she descended to the room where Miller anxiously and nervously waited.

He was startled by her entrance, and still more startled when he saw the expression of her face, it was so hard and determined.

“Tell me,” she said abruptly, “all that you know about this claimant to Mr. Phillips’ property.”

Swayed still by that influence which her youth, beauty, and apparent artlessness had acquired over him, he cast about him for some means of softening the recital he had to make: despite what he had at last been forced to believe of her, he would still spare her. She seemed to divine his thoughts.

“Please speak to me very frankly,” she said, with the same abruptness which she had used before, but with a tone of determination that at any other time would have seemed impossible to accredit to her; and sinking into a chair she fixed her eyes full upon his face.

He did not preface his communication this time with his usual “My dear Mrs. Phillips;” instead, he said, hurriedly.

“This claimant to Mr. Phillips’ property is Mr. Phillips’ own and only son. Mr. Phillips’ name was Thurston; it only became Phillips some years since, when in order to possess a fortune bequeathed to him, he was obliged to have his name changed by law to Phillips. Being a widower, his son was his only heir, and to guard against all contingencies a will was made entirely in the son’s favor. But they quarreled, desperately quarreled; it so angered the father, who had an

implacable temper when aroused, that he entirely disowned his son. They parted, but the shock told so fearfully upon Mr. Phillips that it developed an affection of the heart which the physician said might prove fatal any moment. He went abroad, met the Tillotsons, and after, through them, met you. Though continuing so angry with his son that he would make no overtures towards a reconciliation, he must still have had some hope of receiving such from him, for he commissioned Mr. Rodney, who was at that time his lawyer, to keep advised of young Mr. Thurston's whereabouts. Rodney did so; but when he would speak of the young man, since he could bear no plea for pardon from him, the father refused to listen. At length, when angered anew by this seeming stubbornness on the part of the young man, he met you, he resolved to marry you that he might revoke his will in favor of his son, which as yet had remained unaltered. With all these facts Mr. Tillotson was thoroughly acquainted, but neither he nor Mr. Phillips thought it necessary to tell them to you, since by his utter cutting off of his son it was hardly probable you would ever meet him, and the very mention of his name had grown to be intolerable to Mr. Phillips. He had, however, appended a condition to his will: that condition you read just before your marriage."

"I read it, but I was too excited to understand it," interposed Helen; "tell it to me now."

Miller paused and looked at her; possibly he was

beginning to see under the lovely surface, and to discover interior things which were not so beautiful.

“If you read it at all, Mrs. Phillips,” he resumed, “it was very easy for you to understand it. It was simply that you were never on any pretense, or for any necessity, to give one cent of what Mr. Phillips should bequeath to you to Gerald Thurston; it did not state that the latter was his son, it simply mentioned the name.”

A faint “Oh!” which she was unable to repress, escaped Helen’s lips, and her face colored for an instant.

The lawyer resumed:

“You signed the paper which contained that condition, Mrs. Phillips, and your marriage took place. What occurred between that and the moment that your husband was stricken down lies between your own heart and God. He, in an interval of speechless consciousness, contrived to make us understand that he wished Rodney sent for, and when Rodney arrived Mr. Phillips was able with some difficulty to speak. He desired to be alone with him. We accordingly withdrew, I going to the library, the physicians remaining within call. In a few minutes they were hastily summoned, to find the dying man again making attempts to speak. He contrived at last to ejaculate some words which were to the effect that he wanted his first will to remain,—his will in favor of his son. He was unable to make any

signature to that effect; and, while I was summoned from the library, you also were summoned to him,—not by his request, however. I met you at the door, you remember, but those about the bed signalled to me that he had just departed. Mr. Rodney communicated to me the subject of his private conference with Mr. Phillips, and, though Rodney was himself convinced of the truth of the communication, I believed it to be the vagary of a dying man, or, if even it were partly true, that there must have been vastly extenuating circumstances. The physicians also, on hearing his story, declared that it could not stand in court, for the mind of the deceased was affected. However, Mr. Rodney, who is strongly attached to young Thurston, determined to contest the will. I should have told you all this before, Mrs. Phillips, but your feeble state of health made me hesitate to do so. Now, however, you know all the facts.”

She rose, her lips quivering, her eyes full:

“ Oh, if I had known before that it was Mr. Phillips’ son I was debarring from his fortune! But I shall no longer do so; I could not be so cruel. From this moment I waive every title of mine to Mr. Phillips’ wealth.”

She was sobbing uncontrollably. Much of Miller’s old regard for her was restored. He could not remain stoical in the face of such distress, and he said, softly:

“ The law will be obliged to decide the case now, Mrs. Phillips, and the chances are all in your favor.”

Anxious to end the interview, the lawyer rang to know if the doctor had arrived; he was at that moment entering the house, and, futile as Helen felt his skill would be in her case, she was forced, for appearance sake, to see him. So preoccupied and wretched were her thoughts, however, that she scarcely heard what he said, and she gave such wrong and confusing answers to his questions that the physician ordered her to bed at once, and the administering of a soothing opiate, or he would not answer for her sanity. Confident that his order would be obeyed, he left to attend to other professional duties. But Mrs. Phillips was in too excited a state, and too madly anxious to seek some opening out of the dreary way she had made for herself, to think of following the doctor's directions. Impatiently repelling all attempts to make her do as he had ordered, she wandered miserably from room to room, now deciding on one course of action, then on another, again on a third, and finally rejecting all.

In the midst of her aimless wanderings a loud, sharp ring at the hall door startled her; everything startled her now, and she waited with her hands pressed to her heart, while the summons was answered.

In a few minutes a card was brought to her. Her eyes distended as she read the name, and, regardless of those proprieties of which a short time before she was so careful in the presence of the servants, she dashed past the man and down to the parlor, where the sender of the card waited.

"Gerald, Gerald!" She fled to him, kneeling at his feet, and crying as if her heart would burst.

But that stern presence recoiled:

"I have called, madam, to know if you have any explanation to make of your heartless conduct."

Could that be the lover she had left five brief months ago—that tall, stern, determined man. His arms were folded upon his breast, as if by that very attitude he would show her how completely she was shut out of his heart. Not a muscle of his face indicated pity or softening.

"When you have heard all," she gasped, "you will forgive me."

But there was no appearance of any feeling save relentless determination in that stern face above her.

Still on her knees, she raised her clasped hands to him, and told him with a voice broken by sobs of the successive steps by which her vanity and her weakness brought her at last to break her troth.

He interrupted her:

"And you were so far lost to all womanly honor as to pen me such letters as these"—drawing from his bosom a packet of her own recent letters, which she too well recognized—"at the very moment that you were accepting the attentions of another; so far sunk in the basest of deceit as to conceal from me the fact that you had become a wife and a widow? Oh, Helen! Helen!"

For the instant that he was pronouncing her name

his voice changed to a bitter heart cry, and he turned his back to her and walked to the other end of the room. She followed him:

“ Oh, Gerald, I have wronged you, but I have broken my own heart! ”

“ *Your heart!* ” He turned to her almost fiercely. “ If it were but your own heart you have broken, madam, the loss might not be irreparable; but you have broken my father’s heart; your duplicity was the shock which sent him to his grave. Tell me,” in his eagerness bending slightly towards her, “ what passed between you at the last when he saw that it was *my* picture you wore? ”

Anxious alone to conciliate Gerald, and deeming a frank avowal of everything to be the best and perhaps the only plan since she was surrounded by such unfortunate circumstances, she told him of those last dreadful moments with her husband: his accidental discovery of the locket, his violence in opening it, his exclamation, and his subsequent treatment of herself.

“ And all this occurred when? ” Gerald asked.

“ Just before he fell in the fit which preceded his death; ” she answered.

“ And yet you testified in court to his affection for you up the very last moment of his consciousness of your presence. Have you then, madam, added *perjury* to your deceit? ”

She sank again at his feet with a gasping cry:

“Oh, Gerald, have pity on me, I am so miserable.”

He strode from her, then, turning to fling the packet of her letters at her feet, he said, with an appalling calmness:

“I have forced myself to do you the justice of hearing your explanation, if you had any to make; that explanation has but sunk you deeper in my scorn and loathing. As the widow of my poor deceived father you may enjoy the wealth he has left you: I shall cease to press my claim to it, and may you be as happy, madam, as the memory of the many wrongs you have inflicted upon others will allow you to be.”

“Neither shall I press *my* claim to the property,” burst out Helen. “It is yours, Gerald; it shall be *yours*, whether it comes to me or not.”

“You forget. Should it prove to be yours by right of law it will be out of your power to bestow one cent of it on the person you have named.”

He turned to depart, but she had flung herself between him and the door:

“Say that you forgive me before you go; say that in the future we may meet as friends.”

“Never!”

It was not easy to mistake the determination of that single, low-spoken word,—not easy to misinterpret that resolute attitude as he waited to be allowed to pass out.

“Oh, Gerald! my heart is at your feet; trample on it if you will, only say that you will sometime forgive

me; that sometime, even in the distant future, you will be my friend."

"You have trampled on *my* heart, madam,"—she could not but notice how studiously he avoided calling her by her marriage name,—“and while I would advise you to appeal to heaven for forgiveness, for myself I can only say that whenever we meet in future it must be as utter strangers.”

He put her aside, regardless of her frantic entreaties to be heard once more, and hurried from the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

“You have had an interview with her?”

The speaker was Rodney, the former business executor of the late Mr. Phillips, and the person whom that gentleman had summoned under strange circumstances to his deathbed. The party addressed was Thurston, and the same nervousness which had marked Rodney's manner when speaking to Miller in the house of the Tillotsons characterized him now. His hands were twitching, and even his feet were shifting themselves to uneasy positions as he spoke.

Thurston, who had been gloomily awaiting Rodney's entrance, looked up from the position he had assumed near the mantel, where, with his elbows resting upon it, his face had been buried in his hands.

“Yes,” he said quickly, and then his voice changed to savage bitterness. “I have seen my stepmother.”

Rodney approached him.

“And what is the result?” he asked, his hands increasing their restless motions.

“The result? It is this, Rodney: a confirmation from her own lips of all that I fain would have believed so false.”

“Ah! Then she acknowledged the truth about the

last scene with her husband? It was as his dying lips had told me? Then we shall have a clear case in your favor, if it can be proved that their relations were *not* friendly to the last," and he rubbed his hands more vigorously in his intense satisfaction.

"No," said Gerald, with quiet determination. "I have done with the business now. From the first I was willing to contest my claim only that my father's wealth, if it came to me, might be hers, might give *her* the enjoyment she craved. Had I but known! Oh, Rodney, it was cruel not to have told me," letting his hands drop by his side in the utter abandonment of grief.

"Listen, Gerald," and in his sympathy the little executor actually ceased his nervous motions for a moment. "I held so strong a hope myself of a complete reconciliation on the part of your father that I could not but imbue you with the same hope, and I'm inclined to think it would have been so had he not met Miss Brower. But even then, had there been one word from you, Gerald, one half expressed wish to be forgiven, I am confident your father's heart would have opened to you again."

"I could not," interposed Gerald, violently agitated. "I could not, remembering his words to me on that last day; and had he half a father's heart he would have recalled those words immediately they were uttered. But he has had his revenge."

He folded his arms and drooped his head moodily forward again.

“You continue to blame me for the course I have pursued,” resumed Rodney; “but it seemed under the circumstances to be the best. Disliking the freedom and pertinacity with which I would speak to him of you, he transferred his business to another lawyer, and the first that I knew of his marriage, or even of his intention to marry, was when I was summoned to his deathbed. He would see me alone, to pour into my ear his discovery of the cruel deception which had been practiced upon him by Mrs Phillips, and in his rage against her he was as anxious to cut her off from his fortune as he had been to disinherit you; then, also a sort of remorse for his treatment of you, and a pity for you because of the deception which he felt must also have been practiced upon you, seemed to struggle with his other emotions. But, feeling that his time was growing short, he bade me make immediate preparations for the annulling of the last will. I summoned the physicians, the only witnesses within instant call; your father, however, was too far gone to do more than utter in a disjointed way his wishes with regard to his first will, and when Miller, who had been summoned also, entered the room all was over.

“I told my story to the doctors and to Miller, in order that they might understand upon what excellent grounds the last will could be disputed, but they called

it the vagary of a dying man. However, I understood the case better than they did, and, happening to go through the parlor that same day, I found this." He drew from his breast the locket containing Gerald's picture; with a sickening sense the latter recognized it: it was his first gift to Helen. "That," resumed Rodney, "confirmed the communication your father had made to me; he said that he, on seeing whose picture the locket contained, had torn it from her neck."

"I know," interrupted Gerald; "you have told me all this before."

"Yes; and I should have told you what is to follow," said the lawyer, "only you were too excited to listen to me, and too eager to have an interview yourself with Mrs. Phillips."

"Because her conduct seemed too horrible," said the young man, "and I hoped against hope that there might have been something which would still leave her guiltless in my eyes: but there was nothing, nothing."

Again he buried his face in his hands.

Rodney resumed:

"I sought you, Gerald, at once; you were too ill to be seen. I could do no more than leave an urgent request to be apprised when I could see you. When such word came, I hastened to Eastbury, it was only to be informed by your physician that I must be most careful not to excite you by any communication. In that case I was afraid to tell you even of your father's

death, and so I made it appear that, because of ill health, he was on the point of relenting towards you. How happy that news made you, you yourself can tell. The necessity becoming urgent for immediate legal steps in regard to the annulling of Mr. Phillips' last will, it made it necessary that I should tell you something of the truth, as your presence speedily would be required in court. So at length I informed you of your father's marriage and subsequent death; but having learned from your own confidences how madly infatuated you were with Miss Brower, I feared the effect upon you should you know that your father's widow and your affianced were the same. In the face of your wild love and your still weak condition I continued to defer the communication, being careful even to refrain from mentioning that your father was a guest of the Tillotsons, and being not a little relieved that you, absorbed in your attachment to Miss Brower, seemed to forget to ask even the maiden name of your father's widow.

"Matters thus continued until the very day of your appearance in the court-room. I meant to tell you upon that morning, to prepare you for the appearance of Mrs. Phillips on the witness stand; but your arrival was late, you remember, and I had no opportunity to whisper a word to you. You heard her evidence; how carefully she concealed the facts of that last scene with her husband; in a word, how she perjured herself."

Thurston groaned; but Rodney, now wrought upon

by his own indignant feelings at the memory of Mrs. Phillips' infamous conduct, continued:

"Indeed I'm not sure but that her fainting at your feet was a very pretty piece of acting, all of a part with the rest of her nefarious doings. And yet all that you saw and heard in the court-room, was not enough to convince you of her treachery. You acted like a madman, refusing to listen when I would have explained why I had concealed the true facts of the case, until you should have had an interview with Mrs. Phillips. You have had that interview, and you are not much more sane than you were a few hours ago. Be a man, Gerald, and throw this jade of a widow to the devil."

The little lawyer's excited feelings had hurried him into profanity.

A part, at least, of the counsel seemed to be adopted, for Thurston, standing suddenly erect, said, with a calmness that surprised his listener:

"You mistake me, Rodney, if you think that any woman could have power to blight my manhood. I should scorn myself were I not above such weakness."

"Ah! that is like yourself; you have your father's spirit," said the lawyer, with joyful vivacity; "and when you come into possession of your father's property——"

"Hold!" interrupted Gerald. "I have already told you I shall withdraw my claim to that; let my step-mother possess the wealth for which she sold herself.

My present business gives me a salary adequate to all my wants, and besides it affords occupation for my mind, which is the best thing for me now. So, Rodney, by the friendship you bear me, let me hear no more of disputing my father's last will; since he could be so unfatherly as in the first place to will everything away from me, let it remain so. I promise you to forget that I ever knew the woman who now bears my father's name."

But the lawyer was still unwilling and dissatisfied.

"I swear," he said hotly; "but it is too devilish bad that minx should have what is yours by right. Why, do you know how rich she will be?"

"Do you know how rich *I* shall be?" interrupted Gerald. "Rich in that which no money could ever purchase,—my own independence and fortitude to bear and rise above all the wrongs which come to us from poor, weak human nature."

"And how are you going to manage this forgetting business?" asked the lawyer. "By going to distant scenes for a while?"

"No!" emphatically. "By going back to the business which has suffered somewhat during my illness, and devoting my energies to it in such a manner that I shall have no time for melancholy brooding."

"And by vowing to hate the sex, I suppose, for the rest of your natural life?"

The lawyer spoke in a jocular tone, but yet with so

solemn an expression of face that a smile shone for an instant on Gerald's pale, thin features:

"Well, I certainly shall not be disposed to trust any of them; and you may rest assured of one thing, Rodney: that I never again shall occupy a position in which it will be necessary for me to trust any of them."

"Softly, my boy, softly; I have heard jilted lovers rant at petticoats before, and yet they found other fish in the sea as good as that they had lost, and—" But Gerald had turned impatiently away.

Rodney resumed his serious tone:

"Suppose this little widow should take it into her head to return to Eastbury; she will have means enough to buy out the whole village and live as sumptuously as she chooses."

"That would make not the least difference to me," was the reply. "In my interview with her I told her that in the event of any meeting in the future, it must be as strangers. I tell you, Rodney, she is nothing to me now."

He was not excited, though he had spoken a little warmly, and as the lawyer marked the lines which from mental suffering already indented his face, he knew with how strong a will—his father's indomitable will—the young man had curbed his fiery agony.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE sensational press, that had expected so much from the case of the contested will of the wealthy Mr. Phillips, was disappointed, for beyond that first day's proceedings in which Mrs. Phillips had fainted so strangely at the feet of her stepson, there was nothing to feed even the slightest love of sensational gossip; and the claimant to the property through the first will having quietly withdrawn, the second will, duly admitted and proved, placed the beautiful young widow in a dazzling position so far as regarded wealth.

All business pertaining to that contested document being settled at last, Mrs. Phillips was free to go where she would, and to Eastbury, according to her first determination, she intended to go immediately. Miller, in his capacity as her business executor and guardian, since she seemed to be so unprotected, would have journeyed with her all the way to the little village, but she firmly declined his courtesy; she would not even take her maid, faithful Jennie, much to the latter's disappointment and regret. So quite alone, save that the lawyer *would* accompany her in the carriage to the depot, Mrs. Phillips departed on her journey. She was in heavy weeds, and not once during the long ride

did she lift from her face its sombre crape covering. Her thoughts could betray themselves as they would behind that thick screen, and she could recount her plans for the future without fear of meeting some inquisitive eye. She had telegraphed to Miss Balk to meet her at the station and now, as the train stopped at the low wooden structure which served as a depot, Mrs. Phillips was obliged to throw up her veil, for the December day was drawing to a close. Lights were twinkling in the little place, and a couple of country hacks were in waiting. In one of these Helen at once recognized the angular form of Barbara, and she hurried to it. Miss Balk was startled,—so startled that she positively recoiled from the little figure springing lightly into the vehicle.

“Have you no welcome for me, Barbara?” as the driver started his horses in the direction of Eastbury.

Still no answer from Miss Balk, and Mrs. Phillips, throwing herself back on the seat with that ease of position in which she ever indulged, resumed:

“One would think I had scared you out of your voice. Did not my letter, telling you all that had happened, reach you last week?”

“It did,” replied Barbara’s wonted slow, deep tones; “and I was thinking that you *had* broken somebody’s heart, but it was not your own.”

It was too dark to see the working of Mrs. Phillips’ countenance, but by the change in her position it would

seem as if she half winced under the remark. She said, pettishly:

"It is too bad, Barbara, that your first word to me must be a taunt; have you no feeling for my sufferings since I saw you last?"

"*Your sufferings!*" and Miss Balk laughed, that short, hard, dry laugh which Helen never could hear without feeling as if it would be a relief to gnash her teeth against it.

"*Your sufferings!*" she repeated. "Why, Helen, your heart is so tough from vanity and selfishness that all the sufferings in the world wouldn't make an impression on it, so long as they didn't hurt just yourself. But you tried to break Gerald Thurston's heart, I have no doubt. Lucky he found you out before he married you; pity his father hadn't found you out too."

"If you say another word like that, Barbara, I'll jump out of the carriage."

Barbara was not daunted.

"Jump," she retorted; "perhaps you'll have more success in breaking your neck than you have had in breaking your heart."

But Mrs. Phillips did not follow the advice; she put her hands over her ears, and, shrinking to the farthest corner of the hack, let Miss Balk's tongue wag as caustically as it would; Barbara, finding her companion to continue silent, relapsed into a silence herself, and neither spoke until they arrived at the little country

house from which seven months before Helen Brower had gone forth.

The stout country maid of all work, whom Miss Balk in anticipation of Helen's coming had engaged some weeks before, had an inviting supper neatly laid in the small but cozy dining-room, and thither Helen repaired, waiting only to fling off her outer wraps. The lamplight was not sufficiently strong to reveal her as plainly to Miss Balk as the latter seemed to wish by her long continued and searching look, but it was enough to show that though Helen was very pale and looked strangely older than when she left Eastbury, her beauty seemed to be none the less; indeed, there was a softened tone about it from her very pallor that lent to it a new charm and interest. If she still suffered as she said to Barbara that she had suffered, or any remorse or regret mingled with her present feelings, she most skilfully concealed all, and, proceeding at once to her supper, she ate with an appetite that at least had not suffered.

Barbara deigned to break the silence:

"You are rich, Mrs. Phillips, I believe."

Mrs. Phillips looked up; accustomed as she was by this time to her new name, it seemed very odd pronounced by those unfeminine tones:

"Yes, Barbara, very rich; worth about——"

"Don't trouble yourself to mention the amount," interrupted Barbara; "the New York papers stated that."

Mrs. Phillips started. Her companion continued:

“When I received your letter acquainting me with events which had happened some weeks previous, I thought I’d learn the facts as the public had them. I didn’t know how much you might have concealed. So I sent for all the New York papers that were likely to contain any information, and I found that, with your usual deceitful propensity, you had not written of your swoon in the court-room. The papers said when Thurston spoke to you, you fainted at his feet. Did he curse you, Helen?”

The color glowed in Mrs. Phillips’ cheeks:

“No, he did not curse me; instead, he resigned his claim to the property that I might enjoy it.”

“The more fool he,” ejaculated Barbara, pushing back her chair the better to contemplate her companion. “And what does he intend to do?” she pursued; “complete his madness by remaining in your vicinity?”

Helen bent her pretty brows together in a scowl:

“I don’t know what he intends to do, and I don’t care. Gerald Thurston is nothing to me now.”

“Not even as your stepson, not even as the one to whom you are beholden for your immense wealth? You are to be congratulated, Mrs. Phillips, on having so completely freed yourself from the shackles of truth, honor, and gratitude;” and Miss Balk’s sneering tone was even more provocative of her listener’s indignation than were the ironical words.

Mrs. Phillips dashed her cup down so violently that the steaming contents fell on the table and partly over her hand. Angered still more by the pain of the burn she retorted, passionately:

"Have a care, Barbara Balk, or I shall be provoked to the length of disobeying my father's wish in reference to you. I feel like saying now," waxing hotter with every word, "that you shall *not* live with me. I can choose my own abode, and what is to hinder me from living away from you?"

"Nothing, certainly, save the consequences," said Barbara dryly.

"And the consequences?" pursued Helen. "What can they be but a series of petty torments from you?"

"Your father's threat to curse you from his grave in the event of your separating from me," again in the same dry way.

"Oh," was the sneering reply, "since I have parted with such feelings as truth, honor, and gratitude, I may be supposed, reasonably, to be free from such a silly superstition as fear of a dead man's curse."

"In that case I would give to the public everything I know;" and Miss Balk leaned back in her chair and smiled triumphantly.

"*Know!* What do you know?" Helen's voice was almost a shriek.

"Take the step that you propose, and you and the public shall be enlightened simultaneously."

She spoke with imperturbable calmness, her smile assuming the character of mockery.

Helen, too angry to finish her supper, withdrew to attend to her burned hand, and to give vent to her feelings in her own room.

The next morning, Miss Balk seemed disposed to renew the attack; she asked in her sharp way where Mrs. Phillips intended to reside. The latter, with a manner as if she had made up her mind to have no quarrel with Barbara, be the latter as tantalizing as she might, answered, laconically:

“Here!”

Barbara’s astonishment betrayed itself by a slight involuntary start.

“Here!” she exclaimed; “in this little mean house, with all the money you have now, and with your love for extravagance? Bah, Helen! don’t tell me that you have not some deep purpose at the bottom of it all.”

But Helen deigned no reply; she was surveying the limp muslin curtains of the parlor windows. Barbara resumed:

“Do these stylish friends of yours, the Tillotsons, know how you are going to live, and have they approved of it?”

“My stylish friends, the Tillotsons,” replied Helen, trying to imitate Miss Balk’s tones, “have just now too much affliction in the family—Annette, or Mrs. Morgan, having died under the operation necessitated by that

accident—to give any thoughts to me. They are going to Europe, not being able to bear an immediate return to New York, which place they left so recently in such happiness.”

“And her death affected you so little that you did not even mention it.”

“Oh, we must all die,” spoken nonchalantly, and with a shrug of the pretty shoulders.

“Well, when *you* die,” replied Barbara, “it won’t be of anything but chagrin that your heartless, horrid deceit has been found out by everybody.”

Helen laughed, gave another shrug, and left the room in answer to the summons to breakfast.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. ROBINSON'S home bore no evidence of the parsimony with which he treated his employees; commodious and elegant, and surrounded by well kept and beautiful grounds, it testified rather to his high and sensuous living. The servants described the appointments of his table as princely, but all his sumptuous fare failed to increase the flesh on his spare form, or even to cover the angular leanness of his long, pale, heavily-lined features.

In his boyhood he had been comparatively poor, working in the factory which was then owned by his uncle, and living with his uncle who proved as hard a task-master to his nephew as he did to every one else subject to him. The only person to whom the old man was kind was his daughter, a pretty, gentle girl, who seemed as unlike her hard, grasping father as if she bore no relation to him.

Old Caleb Robinson died suddenly, and the property, willed entirely to the daughter, fell under the management of the nephew. It was reported in the village that the nephew managed so well in his own interest as to

make the girl marry him. They went away on their honeymoon, and young Mrs. Robinson came back in her coffin.

“Hasty decline,” her husband said, was the cause of her death, but the people in the village had their own and very different thoughts upon the subject.

Young Robinson came in for all the property, and his wealth gave him influence enough to set at defiance every evil report.

He lived at first in strange seclusion, devoting all his energies to the factory, and enlivening the solitude of his home hours by repasts the sumptuousness of which, being described by the servants, formed a frequent theme of gossip among his poorer neighbors.

He was never known to assist a charity; indeed, those who were interested in any benevolent scheme had long since ceased to subject themselves to the humiliating repulse which was sure to follow an appeal to him. He had not entered a church since he was a boy, and he was accustomed to pass such, of whatever denomination, with haughty stride and contemptuous look. While he laughed at the notion of hell, he firmly believed that each of the lower animals possessed a soul, and to any one who was bold enough to argue religion with him he flung long passages of the Bible, proving that he knew much of the book by heart, but every passage was so interlarded with profane speeches and shocking oaths, that the party starting the argument not only generally

retired from the contest but retired with the feeling of being badly worsted. It was the only time that he was known to use profane language, and some said he did it in order to escape arguments on a subject so distasteful to him.

His hard, grinding measures with the employees began from the first day of his control of the factory; and, hard as the poor operatives had thought the deceased Robinson, they were aghast at the heartlessness of this young man who seemed to forget that he had ever worked among them.

After two years of his seclusion, Robinson made frequent trips to Boston, where some of his kin resided, and after that, two seasons of every year, midsummer and midwinter, brought a large party of men and women to his Eastbury house. He even went to the extent of having the house so much enlarged that it looked commodious enough for three mansions, and he called it "The Castle" by which name it speedily came to be known among the villagers.

His company generally remained a month, and the sumptuous fare with which the eccentric widower regaled himself was lavishly spread before them. He was parsimonious only to the poor, whom he abhorred with all the strength of his little, mean, contemptible soul. He shrank from every contact with them, but until Thurston came he was obliged to do violence to this antipathy, and this feeling made him seek at length

for some one who, capable of assisting him in the management of his lucrative business, might relieve him from all contact with his employees. It was at this juncture that Thurston presented himself with a letter of introduction procured for him by Rodney from one of Robinson's Boston relatives. The young man's gentlemanly air impressed the factory owner; he gave him a position of minor trust and watched him. The vigilance convinced him of Thurston's sterling character, ready tact, and business capacity. He immediately assigned him to a more important position in the factory and speedily Gerald came to be second only to Robinson, and most essential to his employer in all business concerns.

Such was the character of the man who now stood in a room of his own house talking to Thurston. Never before having betrayed the least interest in the latter's affairs, Gerald was somewhat surprised to find himself subjected to quite a catechism. It was his first opportunity for a conference upon anything save business since his return to the factory after his illness, and this evening it was at Robinson's own request that he had called upon him. The room in which they sat was a spacious, deeply wainscoted apartment, with dark paneled walls and innumerable gilded sconces, in every one of which blazed a wax candle. Robinson had a fancy for wax candles, and while the rest of the house was illuminated by gas, his own bedchamber and the room which he

called his study—though the name seemed a misnomer, there being not a book in the apartment—were lit by a profusion of wax candles. The light was quite bright, though with that peculiarly softening effect given by wax, and it brought into distinct view the rich antique furniture, while the fire glowing in the wide grate added picturesquely to the effect.

Robinson, like Miss Balk, had learned from the papers the events in which his young manager had so prominently figured, and in reference to those events he was now saying, with something like an attempt at jocularly, but which attempt was more like the grim effort of a death's head:

“Guess you didn't reckon on such a shabby trick, losin' your fortune by your father marryin' agen. It struck me all of a heap to read in the papers that the lady was Miss Brower, of our own place here; that deuced pooty girl that I used to meet once in a while out walkin' with her father. Didn't it give you a pooty nice upsettin' when you found out *she* was the widow? or maybe you knowed her pooty well, livin' here near her so long.”

“I knew her,” answered Gerald briefly, thankful that Robinson's slight intercourse with the people of the village kept him from ascertaining how well he had known Miss Brower, and hoping that the factory owner would not pursue his questions.

Robinson resumed,—

“The matter ain’t clear to my mind. I can’t fix how you’ve come to give up your claim; wouldn’t it stand?”

“I hardly think it would,” said Gerald nervously.

“Well, I’ll tell you what to do. Make up to the widow, Gerald; you’re pooty good-lookin’, and——”

But Gerald had risen from his chair, and with a face so pale it looked ghastly in the light of the candles, he was saying:

“I must beg, Mr. Robinson, that you will not jest upon such a subject; my father’s death, and the unpleasant circumstances connected with it, are too recent for me even to bear to speak about them.”

The small, keen, greenish eyes looked sharply at the young man, though he answered lightly:

“Pooh! You’ll get over all that squeamishness; such feelings are well enough in women folks, but a man don’t want to be shackled by them; as you’d rather be let alone, we won’t say any more about it. And now, I reckon, I’d better tell you what I wanted you over here for this evening: I want you to come here and live with me.”

“Live with you?” Gerald seemed to be amazed.

“Yes; board with me, if you’d rather have it put that way; but I want you here, anyhow. It’s deuced lonesome when the company goes.”

So far as Gerald’s choice of an abode was concerned, now that his mind since the great shock it had sustained was completely indifferent to outward surroundings, it

mattered little; he felt that he could live equally well among South Sea Islanders, or Esquimaux. His only regret would have been the pecuniary loss his change might inflict upon Mrs. Burchill, but on that very morning the good woman had told him of *her* intended change. Owing to her failing health, she meant to resign the arduous charge of a boarding-house, trusting that the little sum which she had accumulated, together with that which her daughter might command in some position, would be sufficient to support them in a quiet way.

“What’s the matter? Going to get married? or anything else in the way?” said Robinson, getting impatient under Gerald’s prolonged silence.

“There’s nothing in the way,” was the quiet answer, “but your company; you will not expect me to meet them if I live here with you.”

Robinson chuckled; his laugh at its heartiest never amounted to more.

“You needn’t meet ’em if you don’t want to, but I reckon you’ll git a cravin’ for society some time, the same as I used to when I lived here the year through. Methusala! the very shadows became spooks after a while, so I had to have lights to banish them,—lights like these,”—indicating with a sweep of his hand the numerous blazing candles.

Gerald thought the allusion to spooks very singular from such a hard, practical man as the factory owner,

but his own thoughts so absorbed him that he instantly forgot the impression:

“Well, Mr. Robinson, I’ll come.”

“When? Couldn’t you stay to-night?”

There was a strange eagerness in his voice, but Gerald seemed still too abstracted to notice it:

“No; not to-night; to-morrow evening.”

And then in seeming haste he departed, directing his steps to the poor dwelling of Mrs. Hogan, who owed her entire subsistence to his and Mildred Burchill’s generosity. Her husband had been tried during Gerald’s illness, when the latter was powerless to use any influence he might have had in his behalf. He was sentenced to three months in jail on the strength of Robinson’s charges, Robinson going so far as to cause to be raked up against the poor culprit an offence for which he had been amenable to the law years before, when he did not work in the factory, and the punishment for which he had escaped through some technicality. But Gerald since his recovery had been the steady friend of the poor wife and her little ones, and it was his promise to obtain some employment—not, however, in the factory—for Dick on his release, that kept the poor creature at all hopeful.

“God bless you, and God *will* bless you, Mr. Thurston,” she said, as he left in her hand an earnest of his intention to continue to help her; “if it was not for you and Miss Burchill, I don’t know what I’d do at

all. She was here to-day, not only attending to me, but nursing a little lone sick thing upstairs that its mother had to leave while she went out to work."

But Gerald scarcely heard her; he was thinking of so many other things.

CHAPTER XX.

THE Eastbury papers had copied pretty fully all the New York accounts of the Phillips will case, and from them Miss Burchill learned of the singular events in which Mr. Thurston and Miss Brower had recently figured, but she knew not whether to pity either or both; from what she had discovered during Gerald's delirium of his attachment to Helen, it would seem as if he had been grossly wronged, but again, she could not conceive Miss Brower acting so treacherously, and at length in her doubt and perplexity, she resolved to dismiss all thoughts of the subject; this was the easier to do, as her mother's failing health demanded her closest attention. It was with no little satisfaction that she had sought Miss Balk to tell that lady of her mother's intention to resign the boarding-house; but Barbara received the news with great nonchalance, coolly remarking that Miss Brower's expected return would expedite her own departure from Mrs. Burchill's. For Gerald, however, to whom her mother communicated the intended change, she had a very different feeling. She experienced a vague regret at his going which she could not understand, and for which she could not

account, and sometimes, despite all her resolutions to the contrary, she found herself thinking about and even pitying him; he bore that in his face which seemed to express severe mental suffering. She did not see him on his departure, but he left a kind adieu for her with her mother.

“And it seems like a bit of good luck, dear,” said Mrs. Burchill, “his going to live with Mr. Robinson. Since you’re so averse to see Mr. Robinson yourself about your position, Mr. Thurston wouldn’t mind speaking to him for you. Indeed, I was on the point of asking him to do so, but I thought you mightn’t like it.”

“Oh, mother, I am so glad you did not speak to him;” and Miss Burchill’s forehead and neck were scarlet as well as her cheeks.

Mrs. Burchill looked strangely at her daughter, saying after a long silence:

“Well, Mildred, I think you’re a little unreasonable. I can’t see the harm in your calling on Mr. Robinson when he himself requested it; to be sure, he’s hard to the poor, and there’s queer stories told about him, but they have nothing to do with you.”

“I know it, mother, but I cannot meet this man,” burst from Mildred with unusual vehemence. “I have an unaccountable and instinctive dread of him. I would rather never get a position if I must owe it to his favor. Please, don’t press me any more.”

"Well, I won't, dear, since it disturbs you so. But I wish you were sure of the place; I'd die easier, knowing that you had the means of a respectable livelihood."

"Why talk of dying, mother darling?" and the tears gathered in Mildred's eyes. "You are not old; you will live many years yet."

"Ah, no!" accompanied by a melancholy shake of the head. "I know my symptoms too well; it's the way my mother and grandmother went. But, you foolish child," as Mildred threw herself, sobbing, upon her mother's neck, "perhaps I'm mistaken in myself, and I'll last long enough yet. But, in case of anything sudden happening, I may as well talk to you now of the matter on my mind. You have thought a good deal of all that I told you the other night, I suppose?"

"I couldn't help thinking about it, it was so strange and sad," answered Mildred through her tears, "and I've looked at the picture you gave me," she continued, "until it has grown so familiar that I could single the face out in a thousand."

"And yet it may be that you will never meet him; but if you do, and he should be in any trouble because of his wild ways, you will help him if it should be in your power to do so?"

"I shall, mother; even though it required the greatest sacrifice on my part."

"And now for one other thing, Mildred darling. Will you promise me that if in the future any one you

dislike, or any one who may have done you an injury, should come to you for a favor, or if it should be in your power to do such a person a kindness, you will do it? I make this strange request, fearing that there may be ever that in your disposition which might be like what my own was—a bitter hatred of any one who had wronged me. I held that hatred once, and I cherished it, refusing assistance to the person who had injured me when it was in my power to give her such. She died in her misery, and I have never been free from remorse since. To save you from anything like that, and to make my own death easy, whenever it comes, by the feeling that I have not made you like myself, I want you to promise me now, promise me solemnly, that you will not refuse a favor to your greatest enemy, even if to grant the favor you must make some sacrifice of yourself.”

“ I promise,” said Mildred, through her blinding tears.

Mrs. Burchill’s fears about herself seemed to be unfounded, for she did not grow worse, though three months passed since her strange conversation with her daughter. They had given up the little house, much to the regret of the boarders, who had learned to regard Mrs. Burchill as a mother, and were living in a smaller and plainer, but equally comfortable house, in another part of the village. Mildred had failed to obtain the position she sought, her influence being insufficient to

win the unanimous consent of the board of selectmen; and to another young lady, whose father had a bank account in Boston, and who only wanted to teach to increase her allowance of pin-money, was given, with some ceremony, the post of junior teacher in the village school. Mrs. Burchill seemed a little sad when she heard of the appointment, but she brightened in a moment, and said cheerfully:

“Perhaps it’s all for the best.”

Mildred applied herself to dressmaking, taking lessons from the only modiste which the village contained, and employing her leisure hours in cultivating her voice. She did the latter in obedience to her mother; for, ignorant though the good woman was upon all musical matters, she had sufficient ear to know that her daughter possessed a fine voice, and from the early childhood of Mildred she had practiced economy that the little girl might have this instruction. So, from one itinerant master or another, according as each took up his temporary residence in the village, Miss Burchill received musical instruction. At this time her teacher seemed to be much superior to any of her former instructors. Unexpected reverses and feeble health had compelled him to seek a living in Eastbury, and his musical ability and admirable mode of instruction becoming known, it secured for him many pupils among the wealthier class. Because of his health he was obliged to refuse to give lessons in the homes of his pupils; conse-

quently, they all came to him. And one afternoon, as Mildred had just concluded her lesson and was about to step from the threshold of the hall door to the little porch, a lady in deep mourning and heavily veiled turned from the walk to ascend the steps. She threw up her veil as she reached Mildred, and the latter recognized Helen Brower, or rather Mrs. Phillips. Never having been introduced, neither offered any salutation, though it was evident the widow desired to speak, and, as Mildred was about to pass on, the former said, hurriedly:

“Is the professor in?”

Mildred bowed an affirmative, and proceeded on her way. That Mrs. Phillips had engaged to take singing lessons was evident, for Miss Burchill frequently met her, as she did on that first day, entering as she was leaving. On one occasion that the professor, delighted with Mildred's execution of a difficult aria, requested her to sing it again, she found Mrs. Phillips waiting in the outer room. Mrs. Phillips, of course, had heard her; and was it surprise at the magnificent voice which made her look so intently at the young girl? Mildred without noticing the look, passed on. But the gentlemanly professor found his courtesy put to unpleasant test by his beautiful pupil that afternoon. She would insist on trying notes for which her voice was utterly unsuited, and at last in a fit of ill-concealed temper at her teacher's unwillingness to gratify her, she said half pettishly:

"I want to sing just what that young woman sings who took her lesson immediately before mine."

M. Clarmont smothered some anathema between his teeth, and looked up from the piano with what calmness he could assume as he answered:

"You would have to possess Miss Burchill's voice, in order to sing what she does."

Mrs. Phillips, however, would have her own way; and as she was a pupil by no means to be offended, he consented with what grace he might, and the aria, which from Mildred's lips had so delighted him, now given by Mrs. Phillips made him feel like banging the piano down alike upon the music and the widow.

Mrs. Burchill seemed to entertain some hope that her daughter's voice might yet contribute to the latter's livelihood, and for that reason, when Mildred spoke of discontinuing the lessons, in order to give more time to her trade, and spare her mother's already strained purse, Mrs. Burchill would not hear of it, nor had the girl herself the heart to press it, when she saw how fondly and delightedly her mother and grandfather listened during her hours of practice.

But the quiet and contented life of the little household was to have a sad interruption. Mrs. Burchill's predictions of her own early demise at last came true, and her end was as sudden as she had feared it would be. She had but time to call her father-in-law and daughter, and to impress upon her daughter the remembrance of

the promises already obtained, when she died quietly and painlessly. The physician, who had been long attending her, obeyed his hurried summons only to find his patient forever beyond his skill.

The poor little grandfather's grief was the most touching. When he was not hanging over the corpse in mute agony, he was following Mildred about with a childish affection that must have gone to any heart; and "Milly" as he so dotingly called her, in her own desolation still felt acutely for him.

"Troubles come not singly," and the young orphan for the next few weeks painfully realized the truth of the adage. The bank which held her mother's little account failed; the modiste, who had promised to pay for her services after a certain time, was unable to keep her word; and the owner of the little house in which they lived, in view of the demand for houses to accommodate the expected influx of summer visitors, raised the rent so exorbitantly that Miss Burchill decided to leave the premises immediately. She had grown very pale and weary looking during this accumulation of trials, and the drawn and resolute look of her face, conveyed the impression that her persistent effort to control her emotions was undermining her health.

The scanty amount which still remained to her must be strictly economized, and, having in the first place to seek a home, she could think of but one quarter of

the village where the rents were not incompatible with her humble means—the part where the Hogans lived. For an instant at the thought of living there, the blood surged madly into her face, then her eyes fell upon her grandfather,—the little old man who had not once smiled since his daughter-in-law's death, and who was rapidly losing his ruddy and chubby look. His melancholy air went to her heart; with an impulsive bound she was at his side, her arms about his neck, and a long pent up burst of tears wetting his furrowed cheek.

“Eh, Milly darling! What's the matter? No new misfortune, is it?”

He knew of some of the unfortunate circumstances which had impoverished them, but Mildred had concealed their full extent; now, however, feeling that he ought to know, in order to be prepared for removal to a poorer home, she said, as soon as she could recover her voice:

“It is only this, grandfather: we must move to ‘Irish Town,’ and I am afraid your heart will break there.”

“Not *my* heart, Milly,” he said slowly, and putting his hand in a caressing way on her forehead; “the hearts of the old are sometimes too tough to break; but it is yours that will be crushed, and if I was not in the way maybe *you* wouldn't have to go there; you could get a place to teach in a family, maybe; but don't let me keep you, for I'll manage to get my crust somehow.”

“Oh, grandfather! It is *you* who will break my heart if you talk in this manner. You are all the world to me now. Can you ask me to leave you?”

She could say no more for her tears.

The fond old hand pressed more caressingly on her forehead:

“I won’t, Milly darling, since it distresses you; I won’t say another word about it.”

CHAPTER XXI.

TEN months of Mrs. Phillips' widowhood had passed, and she was still in the deep weeds which proclaimed to the world her loss; her beauty, however, wore no mourning expression; that was brighter, more interesting, more striking than ever. Her mornings she had employed, to Miss Balk's infinite amazement, in study, engaging for the purpose two special instructors from Boston, one in the languages, the other in the general sciences; and Miss Balk's amazement went beyond all expression when Mrs. Phillips added to her studies, lessons in vocal music. Her voice, while it was clear and high, lacked sympathy and expression, and for that reason she had never given it much attention; now, that she should devote to it hours daily, and even repair for instruction to the home of the teacher, instead of, as in the case of her other lessons, engage an instructor from Boston, puzzled and annoyed the eccentric spinster. Once she spoke of it in her caustic way; Helen who was about to go forth to her lesson, replied:

"I go to this man's house because he is unable to come to me; and I want to help him, poor fellow, as he has little means, and his health is not good."

"*You help him! You doing all this for charity!*" exclaimed Miss Balk. "Well, Mrs. Phillips, the prince of the infernal regions might give you the palm for lying."

"You are quite welcome to your opinion, Barbara," was the nonchalant reply. And Mrs. Phillips, drawing her veil over her face, stepped leisurely out.

Miss Balk, however, was not to be baffled. That evening, while Helen was at her own piano practicing the aria which her teacher had so reluctantly taught her, Barbara was on her way to his residence.

She was received with respectful courtesy, and, waving aside the chair placed for her, she introduced at once, in her grim way, the object of her visit.

As the near friend and somewhat protector of Mrs. Phillips, she had come to know what progress that lady was making in her musical studies.

The gentlemanly Frenchman was a good deal surprised and not a little amused. He had supposed Mrs. Phillips, from all that he had heard of her,—and she was an object of much curious gossip in the village,—to be entirely her own mistress; certainly accountable to no one for her progress in any study; an opinion which now, judging by the authoritative manner of his visitor, seemed to be quite wrong.

"Are you Mrs. Phillips' mother?" he asked suavely, more to gain time in his indecision as to what he should answer than to elicit any information.

Miss Balk bridled:

“I shall submit to no interrogation on my relationship to Mrs. Phillips.”

The Frenchman also bridled:

“And I, madam, can submit to no questioning about my pupils, unless I know the object of the questioner.”

“Oh, as to that,” was the reply, “knowing the poor quality of her voice, I wondered, since she persists in coming to you for lessons, if you were honest enough to tell her about it, or whether you make her believe she’ll be a singer some day for the sake of getting her patronage. In either case it doesn’t matter to me; she has plenty of money, and if you can fool her into throwing some of it upon you, so much the better for your pocket;” and Barbara firmly seated herself on the chair which she had at first refused.

“You choose to be insolent, madam,” said the now very angry Frenchman; “and I shall resent your insolence by asking you to leave my house. I am not accustomed to secure patronage in the way you mention.”

“Oh, keep your temper,” answered Miss Balk coolly, and, turning to seat herself more comfortably, her eyes fell on an open sheet of music lying on a table near; across the margin of the sheet, in large, plain letters, was written “Miss Burchill.” The spinster started, and, turning quickly to the indignant Frenchman, she asked

in her slow, grim way, "Is Miss Burchill also a pupil of yours?"

He answered, hotly:

"I decline, madam, to answer any of your questions, and I must again request that you leave the house."

For answer, Barbara tried to transfix him with one of her piercing looks, but he was in too much of a passion to see her distinctly. Then she said:

"You have also Mr. Thurston, I presume, on your pupils' list. Happy trio,—Mrs. Phillips, Miss Burchill, and Mr. Thurston. Are your terms very high for the gentlemen?" and Barbara laughed one of her horrid short laughs.

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed the Frenchman, hurried by his anger into profanity in his own language. I have no gentlemen at all on my pupils' list. What do you mean, madam?"

But Miss Balk had risen, and was saying, in her wonted measured tones:

"Then Mr. Thurston is not one of your pupils. I am much indebted to you; you have given me valuable information. Good-evening!"

And she departed in her grim way, leaving the professor in a state of burning indignation that scarcely subsided until he saw Mrs. Phillips. The account which he gave so affected that lady, though she pretended to treat it lightly, saying that Miss Balk was slightly deranged, that her voice refused to be steady upon any

note, and for once she did not insist upon going through the whole *repertoire* of Miss Burchill's music. At home she opened fire on Barbara.

"How dare you pry into my business in such a manner?" she said, stamping her little foot, and facing Miss Balk with flaming eyes.

"Because I wanted to test the truth of this wonderful charity of yours, and I succeeded; I discovered that it was not charity which made you take these lessons; it was not directly Thurston, as I thought at first; it was—" She stopped short, and laughed.

"It was what?" almost shrieked Helen.

"Mildred Burchill," answered Barbara, with another laugh.

"I'd like to strangle you," said Mrs. Phillips, growing white as the snowy wall behind her.

"I'm afraid you would bungle the work," was the cool reply; "it is not quite so easy as breaking hearts, or *shocking* people to death."

Mrs. Phillips could trust herself no farther. She dashed from the room and up to her own apartment, where her thoughts held savage council as to how she could escape from Barbara.

Barbara pursed her thin lips together in a very self-satisfied manner, and went out for her customary evening walk. In due time she returned, and with such evidence of having added to her store of satisfaction that had Helen met her she must have noticed it. At

breakfast the next morning, however, Miss Balk gave vent to her complacency.

“When will you sail for England, Mrs. Phillips?” she asked.

Surprise kept the widow silent; she could only stare at the speaker.

“Oh,” resumed Barbara, carelessly, “perhaps you have not heard that Gerald Thurston is going to England. He went to New York yesterday for the purpose, I believe; at least, so I understood the conversation among some of the men that I happened to overhear while out for my walk last evening.”

If Barbara wanted proof of the effect of her words, she had it in the deathly pallor which overspread the face opposite; but its owner sought to recover herself, and she answered with a hysteric laugh:

“Gerald Thurston’s movements are nothing to me.”

That they were something to her, however, was proved by her unfinished breakfast, though she strove to hide the fact from Barbara, dallying over the meal that Miss Balk might leave the table first; but Miss Balk remained, and at last both sat simply glaring at each other. Then Barbara rose, saying, with her tantalizing laugh:

“I am sure the air of England will be necessary to restore your appetite.”

“And I am sure the air of Hades wouldn’t be hot

enough to punish you," was the passionate retort as Mrs. Phillips dashed from the room.

That afternoon, on the conclusion of her music lesson, Mrs. Phillips, instead of going home, took her way to Mr. Robinson's. She had been often on his elegant grounds before, for the factory owner, contrary to what might be expected from his character, opened his grounds to the public; but he had them carefully watched, however, that no fruit nor blossom might be purloined. Possibly the reason of his generosity was his delight in the notoriety which his magnificent place thus gained. On this occasion Mrs. Phillips did not linger to admire the cultivated and natural beauties of the scene, but she hurried to the unusually large and picturesque building which stood midway in the grounds. A deep baying, together with a short warning bark, told her of the vicinity of dogs, and she paused in some affright. An instant later and her fears became sheer terror, for two large dogs, one a tall grayhound, bounded upon her. They meant no harm, however, and Helen's scream, as the great paws were placed in friendly fashion upon her dress, was followed by a hoarse chuckle of laughter, and a command to the dogs, which the latter obeyed by bounding instantly away from her to the person who had given the order. It was Robinson. His hands full of hot-house plants,—it was his whim to gather such himself,—and his low, wide-brimmed straw hat flung back rakish fashion on his

head, gave him a very queer appearance; so queer, that had Helen not been so recently the victim of terror she must have laughed outright.

“Skeered pooty badly, eh?” said Robinson, in his blunt, vulgar fashion; and then as Helen having recovered herself, threw back her veil, he started with astonishment, exclaiming, “Mrs. Phillips!”

She was quite recovered now, and, with her very sweetest smile, said:

“Yes, Mr. Robinson. I have ventured to call upon you without the formality of an introduction. I would speak to you on a little private matter with which I feel that I can trust you.”

She fastened her eyes upon his face, her beautiful, appealing eyes, while her manner had all the fascination of grace and candor. The hard-fisted factory owner was not impervious. Her beauty, the witchery of her bearing, were having the same effect upon him it had so fatally upon others. He actually, much also to his surprise, found himself striving to soften the abruptness of his manner, and to appear gracious and gentle.

“Let me ask you into the house, Mrs. Phillips,” he said; “and you can tell me your business there.”

He led the way up the broad steps, and through the long, spacious hall to the room that he called his study. Though not yet sundown, there was the same blaze of wax lights in the apartment that there had been on

the occasion of his interview with Gerald Thurston. The lights seemed all the stranger that the windows admitted the yet unfaded daylight; but Robinson without passing any comment, drew forward a chair for his visitor, and seated himself.

Helen had given a start of surprise at the unusual illumination, but, finding there was to be no explanation of it she affected an indifference to it, and, assuming her most bewitching manner, she began:

“My business is this, Mr. Robinson: you are aware, of course, of my relationship, by my marriage, to your manager, Mr. Thurston.”

“You’re his stepmother, I believe,” answered Robinson; and then he added with a chuckle, “pooty old son for you to have; older than yourself, I guess, by some years.”

Mrs. Phillips blushed most becomingly, and resumed:

“And you know also, Mr. Robinson, what an unkind will was made, leaving all to me and nothing to him, and so binding me that I cannot give him one cent.”

Robinson nodded.

The fair speaker continued, her voice quivering with the emotion she was actress enough to put into it:

“Being a woman, Mr. Robinson, and having a woman’s heart, I could not rest under such a state of things. I tried in vain to think how I could do some justice to Mr. Thurston, and at last, as a sort of tranquillizer to my poor sensitive conscience, I resolved to

live near him, and spend but as little of my wealth as possible, hoping that some time an opportunity might arise for me to restore to him in some way what ought to be his. Now, however, I hear he has gone to England, and the fear that some misfortune in business may have sent him there has compelled me to come to you. You will help me, Mr. Robinson, to do justice to this poor young man. I feel that you will be my friend; that you will direct me right."

The factory owner's heart was more than penetrated: it was completely thawed. Never had he been in such close contact with so charming a presence; never had he heard such exquisite tones; and so much was he under the spell in which she had bound him that his own voice was a little unsteady when he spoke, and his hard lined face unusually flushed:

"Gerald Thurston ain't in no want of means. He's got plenty, and he's gittin' more every day. And it ain't no misfortune in business that's sent him to England: it's to fix matters for me,—matters about some new invention in the factory. Being as he's got a pooty good address and heaps of education, it wan't best that he should stay at home and I go. So I had to spare him, though it's dreadful inconvenient at the factory; and he's goin' to see the way they do things over there, and I reckon he'll be gone six months."

"And then he'll return and stay with you as usual?" asked Helen, with trembling eagerness.

"I reckon so. He seems to take to the business, and I mean he shall have it whenever I give it up."

"Thank you, Mr. Robinson. You've relieved me of such a weight of fear; and now you will not let Mr. Thurston know anything about my interview with you. He is so proud and so sensitive about everything pertaining to his father's will, that I should tremble for the consequences of his anger if he knew that I had spoken to you. Indeed, I wonder at my own boldness; but I am so unhappy."

She put her gossamer handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed very softly.

"Oh, don't cry!" said Robinson, who wanted to say something which should be quite pretty and quite appropriate; but he was unable to think of anything save such a remonstrance as might be addressed to a grieving child. "Don't now," as the widow's sobs seemed to become more distressing; "it won't do you no good this crying, and it's a pity to waste such pooty tears." Hitting at last on what he thought a pretty speech, and desirous of lengthening it, he continued, "them tears is just like diamond drops; lucky man Gerald is to have such a pooty stepmother crying for him."

Her handkerchief was down in an instant:

"Not for him, Mr. Robinson. I am not crying for him. He, personally, is nothing to me. I cry because I am forced to be a party to the injustice which has been done to him."

“Well, it’s all the same; you’re a pooty stepmother anyhow, and the right kind of a stepmother for a chap to have. But don’t cry any more, Mrs. Phillips,” as the handkerchief was again on its way to her eyes, “and I’ll keep as mum as you want me to do.”

“Thank you again, Mr. Robinson,” and the hand which had held the handkerchief to her eyes was now extended to him as she rose to depart.

He clasped it as carefully as if it were glass and might break beneath his pressure, and then he accompanied her to the door, and was even thinking something of escorting her to the extremity of the grounds when she prevented him by saying a hurried “Good-night!” and speeding down the steps.

Miss Balk had finished her supper when Helen entered the little dining-room, but she chose to remain at the table. Mrs. Phillips’ heightened color and her somewhat nervous manner (she never could help being nervous when Barbara’s eyes were upon her as they were now) excited Miss Balk’s curiosity.

“Have you ascertained the precise part of England to which we shall go?” she asked.

“It will not be necessary to go to England,” she answered quietly, and without lifting her eyes.

“Ah!” said Barbara. “You have heard something;” a remark which Mrs. Phillips did not deign to answer.

CHAPTER XXII.

MILDRED and her grandfather removed to the poorer part of Eastbury. Strangely enough, the only suitable apartments happened to be in the house of the Hogans, and actually adjoining the rooms they occupied. Mrs. Hogan herself cried bitterly for the misfortune which had so reduced Miss Burchill, and she sought by such help as she could give to make the poor little home at least cheerful. For herself, thanks to Thurston's generosity, she was no longer in such utter need, and her husband, his prison term having expired, had employment with a cooper at the other end of the village. Understanding but little about the trade, and hardly putting his heart into that little, he wondered what he did to earn the weekly sum which exceeded his old rate of wages at the factory. Once, in his proud independence he spoke of it to his employer, but the employer said with a smile,—

“Never mind Hogan, so long as I think your work is worth so much.”

And Hogan went his way, wondering still, but never dreaming that it was out of Thurston's pocket the sum came which made up the amount that he did not earn.

Mrs. Hogan questioned in her own mind why Mr. Thurston had not helped the Burchills, being under obligations to them, as he must be, for careful attendance during his illness, and she ventured to hint to Miss Burchill what seemed to be Gerald's duty in this instance to his old friends. Her hint was not well received; indeed, the young girl seemed a little angry at the supposition.

"He is not and he never has been under obligations to us," she said, quite hotly, while her cheeks reddened; "and I should not think of presuming on our acquaintance with him to apply for aid, or to accept his assistance did he proffer it. Further, he knows nothing of our present circumstances, and I must insist, Mrs. Hogan, on your preserving strict silence about us whenever you meet Mr. Thurston."

"Oh, as to that," replied Mrs. Hogan a little abashed, "I never see him now; he goes to the shop once in a while to see how Dick is getting on."

And Mildred, somewhat ashamed also of her slight display of temper, tried to cover it by a playful notice of the baby, who now able to toddle, was plucking at her dress.

Dick Hogan, though he did not indulge insprees as he used to do, gave his wife as much anxiety by his strange, moody manner; neither she nor his children seemed to have any power to rouse him from his gloomy apathy. He ate his meals and went to his work without

vouchsafing a word save as he was addressed, and the expression of his face showed that his thoughts harbored some dark and unhappy subject. The poor, frail, anxious wife sometimes remonstrated with him on his strange abstraction, and Mildred, from where she sat sewing in her apartment, could hear her, the partition between the rooms being insufficient to shut out the sound, and often the needle fell from her grasp as she heard his voice raised in savage repulse of every entreaty.

“I tell you,” he said once, in tones whose menace brought Mildred in some affright to her feet, “that I never cease to see his face; it keeps before me just as it looked in the court-room on the day when he gave his evidence against me, when he caused to be raked up that old story that I thought buried, and brought down Manly from Boston to testify against my character. I have murder in my heart for him, and I’m afraid it will come out some day; then——”

But his wife’s voice, raised in tearful entreaty, drowned the remainder of the sentence.

When he went out Mrs. Hogan came to tell her trouble to Mildred. She had not spoken of it before because she hesitated to burden with her anxieties the young girl who had so many sorrows of her own, and who, from her wan and frail appearance, seemed to be daily sinking under them, and also because she hoped that time would clear her husband’s mind of its gloomy

images. Now, however, she seemed to have lost that hope, and to entertain only the most dreadful apprehensions.

“Your husband is independent of Mr. Robinson now,” Mildred said in her soothing way; “he never sees him.”

“Wait, dear,” interrupted Mrs. Hogan. “He does see him; he watches him. He spoke about it in his sleep the other night, and when I told him of it in the morning he acknowledged how he often hung round ‘Mowbray’s’ just to watch Mr. Robinson go in there, Robinson has a habit of dropping in there every evening. Dick says that this sight of him seems to keep down the fever in him for revenge. But I think it’s the other way, Miss Burchill. I think he’ll take his revenge yet, for he’s so bitter since the trial.

“You see, long ago, when Dick first came to this country, and was an innocent boy, he worked in Boston, and he fell in with lads that seemed like himself; they got him to drink with them and when at last he was let in to know them well he found he had just been used for their own ends. They were thieves in a big way, and poor, simple Dick was brought into the scrape to save them. Sure they turned evidence against him and if it wasn’t for the cleverness of the lawyer showing that something wasn’t right on the trial, Dick would have been sent to State prison. As it was, he got off, and he fell sick of the fright and disgrace. When

he got well he left Boston and after wandering around he came here and getting steady work in the factory he settled down, and then he married me and he thought everything was forgotten. But when on the trial Manly appeared to testify against his character I thought Dick would have gone clean out of his mind. Manly was the man who had tried to prosecute him for the robbery so long ago, and it seems he was a friend of Robinson's, but poor Dick didn't know that.

"So, you see he was made to appear a man of dreadful bad character,—not only stirring up the factory hands to strike and bringing about disorderly meetings, but having been in league with thieves. Sure it left poor Dick with no character at all, and he as honest as the sun and as good a man as the Lord ever made, barring the drop that he takes once in a while. Sure that was hard now, Miss Burchill, wasn't it?"

Mildred nodded; she was too sadly interested to speak.

"And wasn't it hard," Mrs. Hogan resumed, "that Mr. Robinson should have sent the constables to Raney's Hall that night? Sure it was just as he got out of the train that brought him from Boston that he happened to hear one of his work people say to some one that he was going right away to the hall, as he wanted to hear Dick address the hands. That was enough for Robinson; he knew Dick was well able to address the hands, and he went right away and lodged the complaint that had poor Dick arrested. Well I cursed him once when the

blight he put on us seemed so sore, and sure our condition now, with the way that Dick's in, isn't much better. You see, Miss Burchill, he feels his character is gone, and what is a man after that? But the great God is over all and He'll see justice done to us. And I can't help thinking sometimes that Mr. Robinson doesn't rest the easiest. Sure they say he has candles alight in the daytime in the room that he sits in. Well, I hope it's not owing to *my* curse."

Miss Burchill smiled at the poor creature's superstitious belief in the power of her malediction, while at the same time she strove to comfort her.

Poor, brooding, haunted Hogan—haunted by that morbid craving for revenge—was destined to receive a new impetus to his unhappy yearning. One week that his amount of work was less, and its quality much inferior even to that which he was accustomed to do, he refused to take his wages.

"I didn't earn it," he said doggedly.

"No matter for that," was the reply from his employer, who in his hurry to dispatch Dick and to pay the other workmen, forgot his usual caution.

"*No matter for that,*" repeated Dick slowly, while his swarthy cheeks reddened; "then I'm paid the same regardless whether I earn it or not? Is that it?" he asked a little fiercely.

The employer tried to get out of the difficulty by some soothing, evasive answer, and a second tender of the

money with an injunction to take it quickly, as the other men were waiting.

But Hogan again put it back.

“Answer me one thing,” he said leaning across the desk, until his labored breath assailed unpleasantly the face of his listener. “Did my week’s work earn this money? or are you giving it to me for charity?”

He seemed savage enough to force by foul means the answer that he demanded, and the employer being a very small man, and alone with Hogan in the private office, was a little daunted.

“It’s not charity, Hogan,” he said, not knowing what to reply, and in his doubt stumbling on the very answer he should not have given. “It’s pure kindness of one—” and then feeling that he had said the utterly wrong thing, he stopped short. But Hogan had suddenly divined the truth. He sprang erect.

“I have it,” he said. “It is Mr. Thurston who pays me my wages, whether I earn them or not.”

The dismayed silence of his employer answered him.

“I’ll have no more of it,” resumed Hogan fiercely. “I’ll see Mr. Thurston.”

The employer had recovered himself:

“Mr. Thurston went to New York yesterday to take passage for England. Maybe he’ll be gone six months. And now since you’ve found it out, though I wasn’t to tell you, you are to get that much money every week, and if you don’t take it, I’ll send it to your wife.”

Hogan pocketed the money without another word, and hanging his head, left the office. On his way home he went out of his way to pass Mowbray's. Mowbray's was the hotel, or what was named such, of the village. It was a comparatively small building, of neat and comfortable appearance, and its public parlor was visited nightly by Robinson. Dropping in about the same hour, he sauntered about, with his quick, keen eyes taking everything in at a glance, and his hearing strained to catch every word of the most desultory conversation; but he rarely went beyond a brief salutation with any one. Why he came, and came so regularly, never omitting a night, unless he was absent from Eastbury, or when he had company at the house, was somewhat of a puzzle even to the landlord. But as Robinson was too wealthy a man to have open comments passed upon his oddities, mine host did not trouble himself further than to display his civility.

Hogan, as were most people in the village, was well aware of this peculiar habit of the factory owner, and as he had acknowledged to his wife, availed himself of it to watch him. He had told her that it satisfied in some measure his hatred of the man. He did not tell her of the horrid revel which his thoughts held while he caught those passing glances of Robinson; how they gloated in imagination over a secret murder of the factory owner, and how ghastly pictures of his fancied victim in the throes of death started before him; how

he heard piteous cries for mercy, and for answer shouted back Robinson's own unrelenting measures.

It was these thoughts that deprived him of skill and energy in his work, and that caused the gloomy abstraction which, to his wife seemed little better than his old drunken fits.

The thought of his wife and children alone prevented his dreams from culminating in some murderous action. It would not have been difficult for him, being the powerful man that he was, to spring upon the factory owner and overpower him, and the sole reason that he refrained from liquor was lest the liquor, knowing its excitable and ungovernable action upon his temper, might impel him to do the bloody deed. To-night he was desperate,—desperate with the thought of being a beggar, as he felt himself to be, being paid for what he did not earn, and desperate with the memory of what his late trial had branded him, and as he walked moodily along, his hand involuntarily clutched the large clasp knife which he constantly carried. When he reached Mowbray's he drew it forth, opened it, and held it open by his side. The early summer evening was light enough to reveal objects distinctly, and Hogan, in order to avoid unpleasant notice,—constantly imagining himself to be an object of suspicion,—sauntered to a more retired spot; from his position, however, he could command an extensive view, and as he knew it was too early for Robinson's visit, he was confident of seeing him as soon as he should

enter the street on which the hotel faced. While he waited a woman passed him,—a woman poorly dressed, and carrying a bundle; she brushed slightly against him, the contact seemingly caused by her own abstraction, but it roused her. She looked up, to exclaim in an instant, “Mr. Hogan!”

“Yes, Miss Burchill,” he answered quietly.

At the same moment she caught the gleam of the knife in his hand. The remembrance of what his unhappy wife had told her, the fact that he was there at Mowbray’s, waiting with such a weapon, all rushed together to her mind, while the fierce, determined expression of his face blanched her own with horror. She caught his hand that held the weapon, and as if she read his thoughts, she said,

“You will not do it, Mr. Hogan.”

He started. How had she divined his thoughts? Was then his murderous intention so palpably stamped upon his face? He recoiled from her, but she followed, still holding his hand.

“You will not do it,” she repeated, hardly conscious of what words she uttered, only feeling that she must, if need be, move heaven and earth to prevent this intended crime. “How could you ever touch your little ones again if you had a human creature’s blood upon your hands?”

His little ones! That was the tender spot in the poor,

unfortunate man's heart. He hung his head until his thick beard rested upon his breast.

"You don't know my provocation, Miss Burchill," he said huskily. "I am branded as a thief."

"But if you took your revenge you would be hung as a murderer. How could your children live under such a stain as that?"

He did not answer her and his head dropped lower upon his breast; but the knife fell from his hand and lay glittering at his feet. Mildred picked it up.

"Go home now" she whispered; "go home to your little ones and thank God for having saved you from the commission of a crime which might have made them fatherless."

He raised his head and pushed his hat back. It was still light enough to see that his eyes glistened with tears; hurriedly brushing them with the sleeve of his coat, he answered huskily:

"And I'll thank *you*, Miss Burchill, for speaking the way you did; nothing else I think would have stayed my hand because I was so beside myself. I'll go home, as you say, for the sake of my children."

He turned suddenly without even requesting his knife, that she still retained, and in a moment he was lost in the growing darkness.

Mildred, closing the knife and putting it into her pocket, resumed her interrupted way. She was taking work home, an unexpected order which had been given

her from the daughter of the proprietor of the hotel. Her orders, alas! were very few. She hurried on her errand and having completed it was about leaving the house when she was confronted by the tall, spare form of Robinson. Trusting that he would not recognize her, she turned a little to the side, out of the rays of the veranda lamp, and keeping her head down was passing on. But the factory owner had recognized her.

"Miss Burchill, isn't it?" he said following her, and trying to look under her hat.

She looked up timidly and recoiled a little as she answered in the affirmative.

"Don't look so skeered," he said, trying to be jocular, but succeeding only in being grim. "I don't eat people when I speak to them; but I reckon you must have thought so, when you never came near me for that place in the school. I could have got it for you. Why didn't you come?"

"I trusted to get it through Mr. Marsh's influence," she answered.

"And you didn't want mine, eh?" accompanying his remark by his usual hoarse chuckle.

Mildred did not reply.

"Wa'n't that it?" he persisted, trying again to look under her hat, and in the effort bringing his face unpleasantly near her own. She sprang back, and then drawing herself up, answered with so much dignity in her manner that Robinson himself shrank a little:

"I must beg you to excuse me from replying to your question, Mr. Robinson, and thanking you for your kind offer of the past, I bid you good-night."

She glided by him and was down the steps before the factory owner had recovered from his surprise. Then an expression came into his face which appalled even the loungers on the veranda who happened to be near him, and who had been wondering spectators of the interview. It was an expression of ferocious hate, nor did he seek to put it out of his face as he stepped into the hall that led to the parlor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE usual summer advent of visitors was upon Mr. Robinson but among them was one who seemed to be not at all of them, a shy, homely little girl, not more than eleven years old, and yet bearing in her sallow face the appearance of far maturer age. Her black dress with its trimmings of crape, showed that she was in mourning for some one, and her great black melancholy eyes looked as if they were always ready to shed tears. Yet she made one of the gay party on every occasion, looking odd enough in her sombre dress amid the bright tints of the surrounding costumes. Curiosity in the village was rife about her. Most of the visitors by whom she was accompanied were known, at least by sight, from their former visits, but of her nothing was known, and when at last servants' gossip circulated the facts about her they were difficult to believe. It was said that she was Robinson's niece, the only child of his poor forgotten sister; that the latter had died recently, and having just previous to her death appealed to her wealthy brother, he answered it by adopting her child. For that reason he had her accompany the present gay party from Boston, and in order to banish her melancholy, insisted that, regardless of her mourning she

should participate in every amusement. Such was the story told in perfect good faith by Robinson's own servants, their authority being the lady's maid of one of the guests, who had the whole account from her mistress. The factory owner's own attentions to the little girl seemed to confirm the statement. He was seen driving her out on several occasions, and his manner to her was as paternal as it was in his grim, coarse nature to be. One morning the strange pair drove up to Mrs. Phillips' neat little residence. Barbara Balk, hastening to the parlor window at the sound of the wheels stopping before the door, could scarcely believe that she saw correctly. Robinson the factory owner, and that ugly chit of a girl that the village said was his niece, coming to visit *them*! What did it mean? She hurried into the passage, and was still more astonished to find Robinson asking the servant for Mrs. Phillips.

He was shown into the parlor, he and his niece being obliged to pass Miss Balk, who still maintained the position she had taken in the little corridor. Mrs. Phillips being summoned, descended in haste, starting when she saw Barbara.

"What do they want?" said the latter sharply.

Helen made a deprecating motion with her hand lest the party within the room should hear, and trying to wave Barbara back, she entered. Miss Balk stalked in also.

Mrs. Phillips was radiant with smiles and blushes,

and a charming costume, and Mr. Robinson found himself again under the spell which had bound him during his previous interview with her. He strove to meet her with her own easy affability, but his inherent coarseness and vulgarity were not to be banished, nor even much lessened, by any effort he might make. So to the open disgust of Miss Balk who stood surveying him as if he were some animal from which she was undecided whether to defend her dress or her nostrils, he blurted out in his awkward way:

“Thought I’d come over, Mrs. Phillips, and just introduce my niece. She’s goin’ to live with me now, and I reckon she’d kinder like some acquaintance here. Her name is Cora Horton.” He drew forward the little girl and Mrs. Phillips sweetly embraced her.

Robinson’s eyes were wandering over to Barbara. Helen observing that, looked also over to Barbara who was standing very straight and stiff and with a scornful lifting of her eyebrows, evidently waiting to be introduced.

Helen inwardly ground her teeth, but outwardly appeared gracious enough, as she said:

“Mr. Robinson, Miss Balk, the person who lives with me.”

There was the faintest accent on the word “person” as if she had a purpose in using the word, and hoped that her purpose might be divined by Mr. Robinson. But Barbara, for whom perhaps she did not wish such

powers of divination, also evidently comprehended, for she drew herself up more stiffly than before, and while the factory owner bowed in the best style of which he was capable, she returned the courtesy only by a quick, abrupt bend of the head.

Mr. Robinson's Yankee shrewdness was quite equal to the task of understanding Mrs. Phillips' little game, and without again directing the slightest notice to Miss Balk, he proceeded to invite Mrs. Phillips to his place.

"Lots of company there now," he said, in his loud vulgar tones, "so it'll be pooty pleasant for you, and then I've told them I was goin' to bring the pootiest widow in all these parts to introduce to 'em.

Helen affected to be very busy smoothing back the little girl's hair; in its luxuriance, it had escaped in disordered masses from her hat. Robinson continued,—

"Cora, and I will stop for you this afternoon, and drive you up to the house."

"Oh, Mr. Robinson,"—and Helen was standing in her most modest attitude, eyes and head bent downward, and her face bearing the expression of tender melancholy which she had practiced so often that its assumption now seemed quite natural,—“my mourning precludes me from participating in the festivities you so kindly invite me to; but if I can contribute in any measure to the happiness of your little niece, I shall waive my feelings for the present and accept your invitation, at least so far as to call upon you in order to

establish visiting relations between this little girl and myself."

She stopped as she spoke and kissed the child. There was a sound in the direction of Miss Balk very like an exclamation of disgust, but when both Mrs. Phillips and Mr. Robinson looked hastily at her she was in the same erect, rigid position, not even a muscle of her face having changed.

Little, strange, shy Cora Horton shrank from the caress of Mrs. Phillips, while her great, dark melancholy eyes looked at the lady with an expression in which wonder and dislike were singularly mingled.

"Well, I reckon the thing's settled then," said Robinson; "we'll drive over for you about four. Come, Cora."

He stalked out, the child clinging to his hand, and making his adieu to Barbara as brief as had been her salutation to him. His leavetaking of Helen, however, was characterized by all the warmth and deference he knew how to put into his manner.

The chaise driven away, Barbara glared at Mrs. Phillips.

"The *person* who lives with you!" she said, with quiet scorn.

"Why, Barbara, what else could I say? You are not a relative, and I am sure you are not a *friend*." A little low laugh accompanied the peculiar emphasis with which the last word was uttered.

Miss Balk resumed in the same scornful tones:

"You are afraid that I would expect the same attention as yourself, and an invitation to Mr. Robinson's. But don't be concerned, Mrs. Phillips; I shall not interfere with you, for I would not for worlds deprive myself of the satisfaction of beholding your downfall, and that will come speedily enough if you are left to follow your own plans."

Helen, feigning complete indifference, was looking over some books on the table and humming.

"Bah!" continued Miss Balk. "Do you think that I didn't see through your acceptance of Robinson's invitation, qualified though it was by that hypocritical allusion of yours to your mourning? It will bring you to the house where Thurston is—"

"Oh, Thurston is in England," interrupted Helen.

"The house where he likely will be, then," resumed Barbara "and you expect to meet him occasionally, and win him by your pretty acting, and bring him to your feet as he was before. But I'll enlighten you on that point Mrs. Phillips. Sooner than Gerald Thurston would ever entertain regard for you again he would fling himself into the river. Robinson, old, vulgar fool, may be caught by your silly affectations, though his niece, child as she is, seemed to read your character, for she shrank from you. Go on, Helen. As I said on an occasion before to you, your tether will be short, and your pretty face will be powerless enough when the

wrinkles and the spleen of a wretched old age come into it."

She went from the room, while Helen sank into a chair and burst into a passion of tears.

"If I could only get rid of her," she sobbed. "I declare if it wasn't such a horrid crime, I'd like to poison her."

The afternoon brought Robinson and his niece, and Helen was ready to accompany them. Her mourning dress was nearly as deep as that of the little girl beside whom she took her seat in the chaise, but it was relieved by exquisite trimmings of white gossamer material, and the full snowy frill within her bonnet surrounded a complexion as delicate and lovely as rose bloom.

The company to whom she was introduced comprised a half score of elegantly dressed women, none of them as young as Helen, and as many men, few of them being distinguished for aristocratic bearing. They received Mrs. Phillips very warmly, and seemed disposed to pay all that admiring court to her which her vanity so craved. If her superior beauty caused any envy among the women it was admirably concealed, and Helen possessing the rare tact to adapt herself to any society, became almost immediately a universal favorite. She seemed rather to wish to devote herself to the little shy niece; but the child continued to shrink from her attentions, and as Mrs. Phillips remembered Barbara's reference to that same shrinking on the child's part in the

morning, she inwardly raged against the little girl, while outwardly her manner had not one inharmonious ripple.

At the late and elegantly-served dinner conversation was quite unrestrained. A certain freedom, accruing from the very vulgarity of their host, who, ignorant of the true proprieties of cultured society, waived everything that placed a fetter on his own inclinations, seemed to pervade the very atmosphere. Helen's fastidiousness was slightly shocked as she contrasted the company with that which she had been accustomed to meet about the table of the Tillotsons, but the sense of geniality was delightful.

Animated discussion turned upon every topic, the host's Yankee slang, uttered in his loud shrill tones, being often heard above every other voice, and Helen found herself drawn into mirthful debate with some of her neighbors. A chance remark had reference to Thurston.

"Yes," said the person to whom the remark was addressed; "I saw his name in a paragraph of English news the other day. It seems that he has astonished some of those business men on the other side by his valuable ideas."

"Who is that?" chimed in another voice. "Gerald Thurston? I tell you, Robinson, you secured a mine when you got hold of that young man. And they seem to be appreciating him on the other side. I shouldn't

be surprised if they make him such an offer that he never returns. What then, Robinson?"

"I'm not afraid on't," answered Robinson.

"Why?" resumed the voice that had previously spoken. "Are the terms of his engagement with you so good that no better offer can be made?"

"No; I reckon that ain't it; but Gerald's given his word to come back, and I'd stake his word 'gin any oath or contract in the country."

"Model young man!" came in a half doubting tone from the other end of the table.

Robinson half rose.

"Don't you believe it?" he said fiercely. "I tell you Gerald Thurston'd jist as lief hang himself as tell a lie. He thinks a wonderful sight of truth and honor, as he calls 'em, and I don't know but he'd throw any friend of his over for telling him a lie quicker than another'd do for a murder. Fact, gentlemen," as he saw the surprised looks turned upon him; "and that's the reason I trust him as I do."

Mrs. Phillips' cheeks were a deeper crimson than they had been, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely convey her food to her mouth.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GNAWING, hidden anxiety, combined with insufficient food and rest, produced its effect upon Miss Burchill. She was prostrated at last with a slow heavy fever. Then came into activity all the kindness which slumbered in the hearts of the Hogans. Mrs. Hogan was as constantly at the sick girl's bedside as the care of her own little household would allow her to be, and from her table poor old Grandfather Burchill was supplied; while Hogan himself, learning from his wife of the sick and destitute condition of Mildred, cheerfully devoted part of his week's earnings to aid the Burchills. He actually exerted himself at his work in order to feel that he was entitled to the amount that he received.

The poor neighbors about were all concerned for the young girl; most of them had received kindness from her in some way, and many and frequent were their offers to share Mrs. Hogan's vigils. To the little old grandfather, who hung above her bed in mute woe, their warmest sympathy was extended.

Hogan had brought a doctor who pronounced the case not serious, but one which required the most tender care, and which must necessarily be tedious. So days

and nights passed, Mildred sometimes delirious, and in her delirium repelling the fond old face that hung in such tender solicitude above her own, and again, in an interval of consciousness, trying to clasp her arms about the withered neck, and whispering:

“Darling grandfather!”

One evening Mrs. Hogan came in with a pomegranate. Dick got it she said in the shop. Some gentleman had been up to see Mr. Robinson, who, in taking him over the grounds had given him a couple of pomegranates, with other fruits, from one of the hothouses, and the gentleman coming directly to the shop on business, and not being partial to pomegranates, gave one to the employer and the other to Dick, who happened to be in the office of the shop at the time. Dick thinking of Miss Burchill saved it for her. The poor sick girl seized it with avidity and put it to her parched lips. Her enjoyment of it appeared to bring her strength for the moment, and her grandfather watching her with delight, turned sorrowfully away when, having devoured it all, she seemed to wish for more.

“Can’t they be bought anywhere?” he asked Mrs. Hogan.

“No,” was the reply; “it’s only Mr. Robinson that has them in his hothouse. They don’t grow here.”

“Would he sell any, do you think?” the quavering tones asked again.

“ Oh, dear no! They say he doesn't even let the gardener pick the hothouse fruits for the table; that he always picks them himself.”

He turned away with a sigh; but all that night and the next day the thought of the fruit haunted him. Poor Mildred's parched lips seemed to crave it from him, and as he remembered the avidity with which she ate the one given her, he was tormented by the thought that a few more might make her well. Late in the afternoon, when Mrs. Hogan came to resume her watch in the sick-room, and at the same time entreated him to take a turn in the air, he did not refuse with such determination as he was accustomed to do; and after a little while as Mildred seemed to slumber and her kind-hearted attendant quietly watched her, he put on his hat and left the house. He took his way to “ The Castle,” pausing when he reached the outskirts of the grounds, and passing his shriveled hand over his face as if he was in undecided and troubled thought. At length, conquering his indecision, he went on with as much speed as his age and trembling limbs would permit, never pausing until he reached the part of the grounds where lay the greenhouses,—row upon row of them,—their glass sides glistening in the sunlight and the delicate plants within showing plainly through the crystal panes. While the old man looked in some bewilderment about him, a gardener appeared from one of the paths that wound among the shrubbery. Accustomed to see stran-

gers on the grounds, the man would have passed without any remark, but Grandfather Burchill hailed him.

"Have you pomegranates growing here?" he asked in his quaking tones.

"Yes, a whole greenhouse full of 'em," was the answer given quickly and with a true Yankee nasal twang. "Like to see 'em growing?" he continued. "Just look here," and leading the way for a few steps, he pointed to a greenhouse, through the glass side of which the luscious fruit could be plainly seen. Indeed, one of the pomegranates seemed within a hand's reach of the pane. The old man's fingers twitched nervously, and his eyes seemed to devour the fruit, while his lips moved in a futile effort to speak. At last he clutched the gardener's arm:

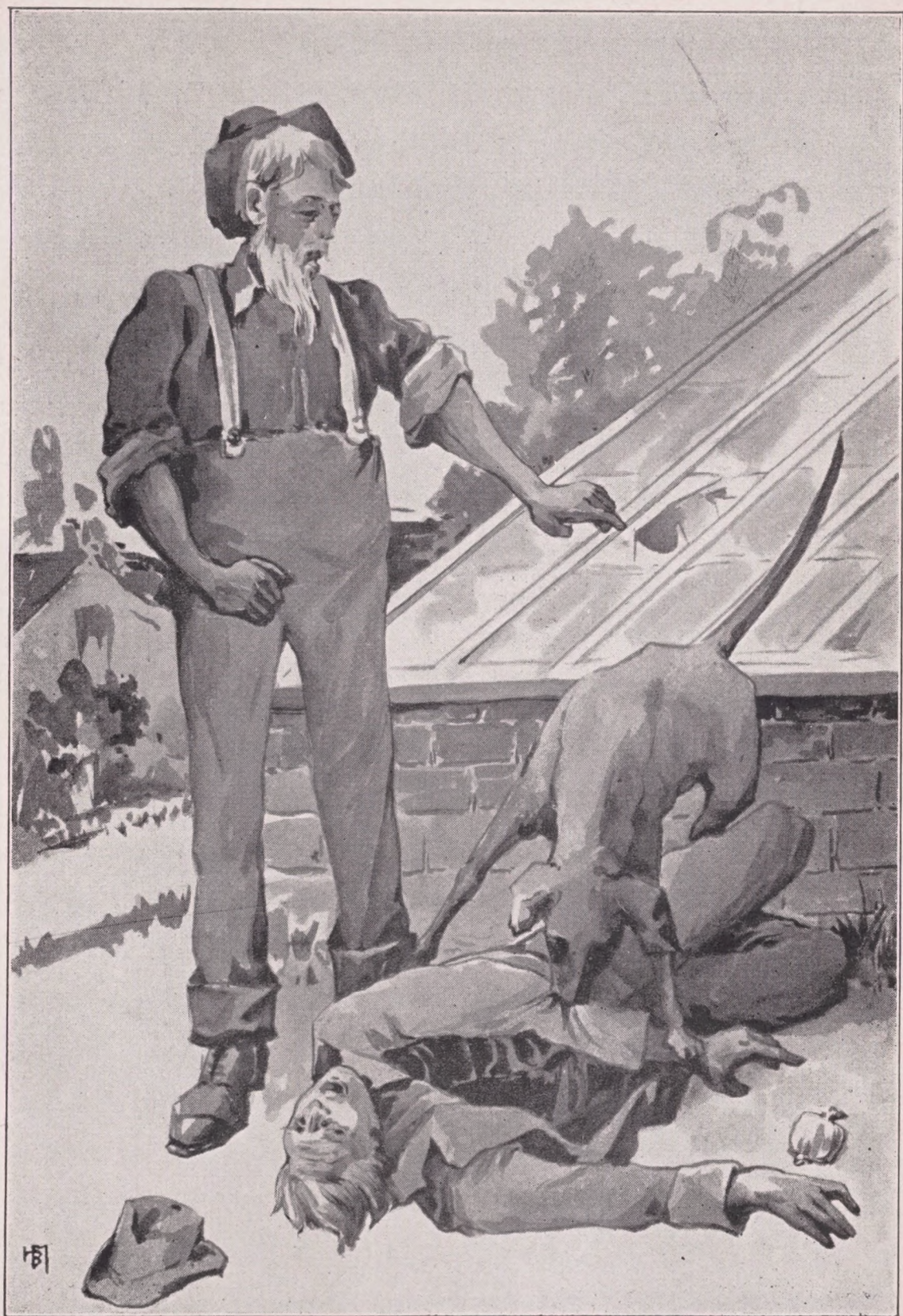
"I've a sick granddaughter at home. Would Mr. Robinson sell or give me just one pomegranate for her? She likes them and I think it would make her better."

The hard Yankee face became repellent at once:

"No one's allowed to touch any hothouse fruits but Mr. Robinson himself, and I reckon old man, you'd ask a good while before he'd sell or give you any."

He turned away, rapidly disappearing down the path which continued to wind through the shrubbery.

Poor old Burchill cast another longing look at the fruit, and turned away also. But his granddaughter's face rose before him; he seemed almost to feel the fevered breath from the parched lips which a pome-



* * and in another moment the old man was down and firmly
pinioned by the fangs of a hound.

granate would so refresh, and he again stood irresolute. The sun was setting, not a sound was to be heard save that of the insects which give to an evening in the country at certain seasons of the year such an indescribable peculiarity. Not a person was in sight. The temptation became stronger. With one rapid look around he dashed his hand through the glass and seized the pomegranate, the blood from his cut fingers dying the fruit; but in the same instant there was the deep bay of a dog, and in another moment the old man was down and firmly pinioned by the fangs of a hound. The gardener, not far distant, heard the cry of the dog and hastened back.

“So that’s what you were after?” he said, in no hurry to release the fallen old man; “reckon you’ll git enough of the pomegranates before you ever git the chance to steal another. Off, Maida,” to the dog who slowly took his fangs out of Burchill’s clothing.

Burchill seemed scarcely able to stand. He was not hurt, except his badly cut hand, for the dog’s teeth had not penetrated to his flesh, but the shock had in some measure paralyzed him. When he recovered his voice, it was to beg for his release in piteous terms. But the gardener was a man too much after Robinson’s own heart to be touched by any appeal that spoke alone to his feelings. Further, the theft was aggravated by the injury to the greenhouse; then his duty to his employer demanded the instant arrest of this aged thief. So to

the house, despite every trembling protestation and entreaty, the poor old man was led, and Mr. Robinson left his gay company to repair to his study for a moment and receive the complaint of the gardener. The gardener did not deem it necessary to tell Burchill's pitiful tale of a sick granddaughter, nor did Robinson care either to see the culprit or to learn his name. He was indignant at the theft of his fruit, and simply ordered that such steps be taken as must insure to poor Burchill the full visitation of the law. Instead, therefore, of returning to Mildred, the old man was committed to the lockup. The Hogans grew uneasy at his absence, and Dick that night scoured the village before he obtained correct tidings of him.

"Robinson again," he said through his teeth, when he heard at last, and he drew his hat over his face lest the man who had given him the information might see the ferocious scowl which overspread his features; but later when he told his wife and she wrung her hands in grief for the Burchills, tears stood in his own eyes, for his heart with all its surging passions of hatred and revenge, was tender as that of a woman.

"We must keep it from her," said Mrs. Hogan, motioning to the room in which Mildred lay, now being watched by one of the neighbors; and they did keep it from her, telling her, when in her intervals of consciousness she asked for her grandfather, that he was resting, or out walking. Hogan gained admittance to him, and

he hardly recognized the feeble, emaciated form. He strove to cheer him, but even the strong man broke down before the touching grief of the poor old creature. Catching Hogan's hands, while the tears coursed down his shriveled cheeks, he said in a voice so cracked that the tremor which accompanied it made it the more pitiful:

"If they hadn't taken me from Milly; I was never away from her since she was born."

But they continued to keep him from Milly, to keep him for his trial, which in those days followed quicker upon arrest than it sometimes does now; and when he was led into the little court-room murmurs of compassion broke from more than one spectator. The gardener was there to press the complaint in the absence of his master, who had gone to Boston the day before, and the charge, with all its grim array of aggravated facts, was presented to the court.

"But it was for Milly," spoke up the poor old culprit, who, quite ignorant of court proprieties, thought it allowable to press his own plea when he would. "Milly was sick," he continued "and I stole it for her." He was stopped then, but his own emotion would scarcely have suffered him to proceed. Even into the hard, unsympathetic faces about him came an expression which showed how his plea had touched hearts that were rarely won by tender appeals, and the court with

great leniency sentenced him lightly. He was to spend three days in prison.

"Three days," he repeated, looking about him with a dazed air; "three days more from Milly. Oh, gentlemen, I couldn't stand that."

But they hurried him away, and Hogan, who had left his work to be present at the trial, dashed his sleeve across his eyes as he hurried out. On that very night Mrs. Hogan was obliged to tell Mildred the truth about her grandfather. She sat up in the bed with seemingly supernatural strength when she heard it.

"Don't, dear," said Mrs. Hogan, trying to keep back her tears; "don't be trying your strength that way. Sure it will only be three days now until he's home to us, and Dick will try to see him between whiles."

But Mildred made no reply. She only continued to sit up in the bed until her exhausted strength compelled her to recline, and when Mrs. Hogan, frightened at the very silence of the young girl, and the evidently stern determination which *would* recover strength, remonstrated with her, she only shook her head and sighed heavily. That strange determination bore her through. She left her bed the next day, and on the second day, accompanied by Mrs. Hogan, she went to the old man's prison. She was admitted without much question, and there was a strange sympathetic look on the face of the man who conducted them to the little bare room in which Burchill was confined. He opened the door, and they

went in, Mildred first. A woman was there, kneeling above some one who seemed to be extended on the floor,— a woman who turned on their entrance and looked up. She had flowers in her hands, and flowers were beside her, as if she had been engaged in an arrangement of them about that which lay beneath her, and then Mildred saw, through a blinding mist of her own overcharged feelings, her grandfather stretched on a low pallet and above him Barbara Balk.

With one cry she was beside him, his dear old head in her arms, and her lips to his, but there was no response to her cry, and the lips she pressed were marble cold. Her grandfather was dead, and the flowers were strewn about him.

CHAPTER XXV.

EVERY day Mrs. Hogan sent or journeyed herself to the factory, to learn if Thurston had returned, the rumor among the factory hands being that he was expected daily. It was not for herself, poor warmhearted creature, that she was so anxious, but for Mildred. Overcome by the shock of her grandfather's death, and prostrated by the reaction which set in after so violent a use of her suddenly acquired strength, she was obliged to take to her bed again. She became wildly delirious, and the fever that she had been fighting for days, returned with increased force. She knew no one, but her ravings were constantly of her grandfather, and while she called so piteously for him his interment took place from the home of the Hogans. While he lay "waking," Mrs. Hogan was astonished to receive a call from Miss Balk. Refusing to pass the threshold, she placed a little packet in Mrs. Hogan's hands, with the request that its contents might be used for the old man's burial; then she stalked grimly away. On opening the little parcel money enough was found to defray amply all expenses. The woman looked at her husband.

“What does it mean?” she said. “But I think I understand it. She was with him when he died. The man in the jail told me how she came there that morning, and after staying with him an hour, was back in the afternoon in time to see him die. Well, God bless her! Queer as people say she is, she has some soft spot in her heart—” an opinion in which her husband fully concurred.

Thurston returned at last. He was at his old place in the office of the factory, and in answer to Mrs. Hogan’s message desired her to be shown to his presence at once. He evidently expected some doleful account of her husband, but how was he startled to find that it concerned Miss Burchill. And such a tale! so full of grief and want; for the good woman concealed nothing that she knew of the poverty and sufferings of Mildred.

“Good God!” exclaimed Gerald, his face settling into that expression of sympathy which in a man gives evidence of rarely tender feelings.

“I was longing to tell you, Mr. Thurston,” she resumed, “for it seems so hard to have the poor young creature wasting the way she is. She’s just able to sit up now, but she eats nothing and she droops so that it would go to anybody’s heart. She needs better care and nursing than I am able to give her, and I thought that by seeing you, you might think of some way to help her.”

Gerald did not answer for a moment; he seemed to be

in deep thought. When he did speak, his voice had the troubled tone of one who is unhappily disturbed:

"Do what you can for her, Mrs. Hogan, and do not fear to call upon me for any money you may need," drawing his wallet from his pocket as he spoke, and taking from it a considerable amount, which he placed in her hand. Then he continued, "I shall see to-day what further can be done."

"God bless you, Mr. Thurston! Sure the poor had always a friend in you," and she went away with her eyes and her heart full.

That evening found Gerald recounting to Robinson, with some bitterness, the sad story he had heard.

"The poor old man's theft might have been excused," he said. "It was brutal to make it a jail offense in his case."

Robinson's small, greenish eyes had distended, and even his large, ill-shaped mouth partially opened in his surprise, so that his yellow, tusk-like teeth were somewhat revealed.

"It's the first I heerd of its being Miss Burchill's grandfather, Gerald," he answered; "and anyhow, I didn't know nuthin' about the case only what the gardener told me of the greenhouse bein' smashed in; that made me pooty mad arter all the privileges I gives the public on the grounds. Besides, Miss Burchill needn't 'ave wanted for something to do if she'd come to me, as I told her mother a good spell ago. But an

idea has just popped into my head. There's my niece, Cora, pining for some women folk to live with her, and studying all the books she brought with her from Boston. Why couldn't Miss Burchill come here and teach her? She could live here; the house is so big that a part of it could be set aside jist for her and Cora. She needn't see anybody else, even at meals, if she's squeamish about meeting us men folks. What do you say to that, Gerald?"

Gerald seized upon the idea also; it would be a complete change, not alone of scene but of life, for Miss Burchill, and affording the seclusion that Mr. Robinson offered, he felt that there was nothing in the proposition which could be repulsive to Mildred.

So on the instant, he wrote to Mildred, prefacing his note by a few most delicately couched expressions of sympathy for her recent bereavement, and then in a very simple manner he stated Mr. Robinson's proposition, after which the note continued:

"Your charge of this little girl would be, I think, from my brief observation of her, a higher work than that of the mere teacher. She is an orphan, and from her face has a disposition for great good. Mr. Robinson will give her quite up to your care, and in the moral training of little motherless Cora Horton, you may find, dear Miss Burchill, something to alleviate your own heavy sorrows and to compensate you for the charge you are asked to assume. It is Mr. Robinson's wish that

you should take all the time you may deem necessary to come to a decision, immediately after which we shall expect to hear from you.

“Yours sincerely,

“GERALD THURSTON.”

Mildred was in Mrs. Hogan's little sitting-room trying to make some child's garment, when that letter came. The work had fallen from her weak fingers, and she had been obliged to recline frequently; but when the kind woman remonstrated with her, and fain would have removed the work, she said with such a touching smile:

“Please let me do it. I won't *think* quite so much while I'm trying to be busy.”

She read the letter with a suffocating emotion of surprise until she came to the little girl's name; then it fell from her hand, and she exclaimed to herself, while her eyes filled:

“Oh, if it *would* be, and that it became my task to teach her! Oh, mother! perhaps your prayers in heaven are bringing this about.”

She resumed the letter, a vivid flush dyeing her face as she felt more and more the delicacy and true kindness which inspired the writer. She read it for Mrs. Hogan, exclaiming when she had concluded:

“How did he know so much about me?”

The woman's guilty-looking countenance betrayed her.

“ You have told him,” she exclaimed, reproachfully.

“ Don’t blame me, dear, I couldn’t help it; and see what it’s brought about,—a nice pretty home for you, such as you ought to have; you will go, of course, Miss Burchill, as soon as you’re strong enough.”

Miss Burchill’s own heart inclined her to the proposition for more than one reason, and the next day Mr. Thurston had an answer of acceptance in a letter which expressed to him in simple terms her deep sense of gratitude.

Having the prospect of this new life before her she seemed to recover more rapidly, and in a week she was able to leave the house. But her first journey was not to Mr. Robinson’s; it turned in the direction of Mrs. Phillips’ dwelling. With a wildly beating heart she lifted the knocker, and to her request to see Miss Balk, she was shown into one of the little rooms that opened from the hall. Though neatly and nicely furnished, it was evidently not the parlor, for the open room across the hall, and of which Mildred had a full view from where she sat, was much more elegantly furnished. While she waited she heard a rustling sound as if some one were entering the parlor from another direction; in a moment Mrs. Phillips, resplendent in heavy black silk appeared. Seeing Mildred, she came hastily forward.

“ You are Miss Burchill?” she said quickly.

Mildred bowed.

“And you wish to see me?” she asked, her voice trembling in her eagerness.

“No. Miss Balk.”

“Miss Balk!” repeated Helen betrayed by her surprise into an exclamation and look of singular astonishment.

At that moment Barbara was coming through the hall, and Mrs. Phillips hastily retired; not, however, without encountering Barbara. Each passed the other with a look of contempt. Mildred arose:

“I came, Miss Balk, to thank you in person for your kindness to my poor grandfather. I have been told that you were with him when he died,” her voice began to tremble,—“and Mrs. Hogan has told me of your generous gift after his death.” Her tears, now uncontrollable, suffused her eyes.

“It wasn’t necessary for you to come and thank me,” answered Barbara, in the same slow, cold tones she always used. “I went to see the old man when I heard he was in prison, because he once tried in his own way to be kind to me. I have a wonderful memory, Miss Burchill,” there was a peculiar significance in her last words,—“a memory for good turns and a memory for bad turns; I never forget either.”

“Will you tell me how he died?” Mildred ventured to ask,—“whether he died realizing all his sad surroundings, or—” She was obliged to stop because of the sob which came into her throat.

There was a slight softening of the unfeminine tones, and a slight, very slight, tremor about the rigid mouth, as Barbara answered:

“He died easy enough; a little raving, I take it; but, for the rest, he wanted you.”

Miss Burchill sobbed outright, and Miss Balk waited. The former recovered herself and said, while the tears glistened on her eyes and cheeks:

“I also, Miss Balk, never forget a kindness. Your charity, soothing as it did the last hours of a poor, friendless, imprisoned old man, has won my lasting gratitude. If, during your stay at my mother’s house, there was anything on my part to cause you annoyance or displeasure, I beg your pardon for it. I am going to a new home to-morrow to enter upon new duties, and I felt that God would bless me more if I came first and discharged this debt of obligation to you.”

A moisture seemed to come into Miss Balk’s eyes, but if it was tears they disappeared too rapidly to allow one to be certain, and, instead of replying to Miss Burchill’s speech, she asked:

“Where are you going?”

“To Mr. Robinson’s to teach his niece.”

A most peculiar expression broke over Barbara’s countenance, one in which wonder and triumph mingled.

“To Mr. Robinson’s” she repeated, in her usual tones. “Well, Miss Burchill, you needn’t charge yourself with any gratitude to me. And now, good-day!”

She did not extend her hand in any adieu, and she left Miss Burchill to find her own way out. What Mildred's sensations were as she made her exit, unattended by even the servant to the door, she was hardly able herself to describe. Certainly her regard for Miss Balk was not increased, but she kept repeating to herself:

"She was kind in his last hours to poor, old, lonely grandfather."

Barbara sought Mrs. Phillips:

"Did you know that Mr. Robinson had hired a governess for his niece?"

"No; has he?" in a tone of quiet indifference.

But her next remark was not so indifferently spoken when Barbara said:

"Yes; and the governess is Miss Burchill."

"Did Miss Burchill give you this information?"

"Yes; she came to secure my good will before entering upon her new duties; perhaps to ask my blessing, if I'd given her any encouragement. No danger of her getting *your* blessing, is there, Helen?"

And Miss Balk laughed her old, hard, malicious laugh, while Helen only looked; but it was a look which told how all the worst passions in her nature were roused, and a look that turned to a glare as Barbara resumed:

"Pleasant prospect for *your* plans, Helen; the pretty, modest, and no doubt *truthful*"—with a significant emphasis on the last word—"Mildred Burchill

under the same roof with Gerald Thurston. Of what avail will be *your* wiles when he has her before him?" And again Barbara laughed.

"I could kill you or kill myself!" shrieked Helen, her face wearing an expression that not alone robbed it of all its loveliness, but lent to it a horrible distortion.

"I have no doubt of it," replied Barbara, with provoking calmness. "But I would advise you to step out of the world yourself; for, in the event of *my* going, there are documents to make certain exposures. Indeed, I don't know but it might be well, since you have so frankly expressed your murderous desire, to confide in Miss Burchill, she seems to be so amiable and so grateful." And without waiting for the burst of passion which threatened in Mrs. Phillips' eyes, she left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS BURCHILL went to her new home, and was installed in her new duties without seeing either Mr. Robinson or Thurston. An upper servant, who seemed to be somewhat in the character of housekeeper, received her, showed her to an inviting suite of rooms which she was to occupy with her pupil, and voluntarily informed her that they were situated in a part of the house entirely remote from the rooms occupied by either Mr. Robinson or his guests; that information Miss Burchill received with much inward satisfaction. The same loquacious domestic would have given her many more items of news regarding the house and its guests, but Mildred stopped her by requesting to see her pupil. The pupil came, entering in the shy, awkward way in which she was accustomed to meet strangers, and Mildred, at the first sight of the sallow face and great melancholy eyes, started and became so pale for a moment that the servant who had entered with the little girl thought she must be sick, and offered to get her some restorative.

“No, thank you,” was the gentle answer; and going

forward, she saluted the child so kindly that she became reassured immediately. Of her own accord she extended her hand, and looking into Miss Burchill's frank, kind eyes, she said, with a childish sigh of relief:

"I am so glad *you* are the young lady that's to live with me. I didn't know but uncle might ask Mrs. Phillips, and—Ugh!" A strange but very expressive shrug of the shoulders accompanied her last exclamation; it made Mildred wonder. "Tell me your name," she said, retaining Miss Burchill's hand. And being answered, she continued, "I haven't had any one to love me since mamma's death. Will *you* love me?"

The little mouth quivered, and the large eyes were misty with tears. Miss Burchill's heart, tender from its own sensitiveness and aching from its late bereavement, was incapable of resisting such an appeal. She pressed the child to her, and her tears mingled with the little one's sobs. That night, when Cora slumbered in her own room, one opening from Mildred's chamber, Mildred took a small old-fashioned picture from her trunk and looked at it long and tearfully. It was that of a very young man, possibly not much beyond her own age, but the face was one of marked character, strong and full, and with an expression that evinced the restiveness of the boyish heart. The eyes and the whole upper part of the countenance were exactly like those of Cora Horton.

"Oh, mother," she murmured, "if it should be!

Then indeed by my love and care of her, may I fulfil my promise to you. Heaven may not grant me a meeting with him, but it may have brought me to her. I cannot understand it," she continued to soliloquize, still looking at the picture. "If it should be she, how does she come to be *his* niece? But, no; I am utterly mistaken; it is only a strange chance which makes the name and the features alike."

She closed the case that contained the picture, and returned it to her trunk; but, firmly resolved as she was to shut out the idea regarding her pupil which had found entrance to her mind, the idea maintained its place, and grew until it entered into all her relations with Cora; it produced at last an affection for her pupil as intense as though the two were indeed allied by blood. The child's disposition was such as to win regard. Frank, confiding with those to whom she became attached, she had also a vein of penetration remarkable for her age; and she sometimes startled Mildred by the depth of her observations. Passionately fond of her books, she quickly learned from her teacher all that the teacher could impart. The avidity with which she studied gave evidence sometimes of a too premature mind.

The seclusion was all that Robinson had promised, and beyond a brief note requesting Miss Burchill to make herself perfectly at home, and the arrival shortly after of a piano for the use of her pupil, she neither saw

nor heard directly from him. Neither did she see Gerald, nor hear aught from him save a message delivered by one of the servants, expressing the hope that she was well and contented.

So the peaceful days wore on, and Cora seemed to lose her melancholy mien; a color often glowed in her cheeks, and her great eyes sometimes sparkled in a way that lit up the whole of her tawny face. The only time that she seemed to become her old, shy, strange self was when she returned from her evening visit to her uncle. He insisted on her company for a certain hour every evening, and on her return she was generally thoughtful and abstracted, and occasionally even acted with a strange timidity, starting at shadows, and clinging to Mildred's hand as they passed from room to room. If she was agitated by fear, as she seemed to be, she never spoke of it, and when, on occasions, Mildred remonstrated with her she only shuddered.

It was difficult to tell with what feeling she regarded her uncle. She did not often speak of him,—indeed, she was given to singular reticence regarding her relatives,—and when she did, it was with the manner of one who, while deeming it a duty to praise, was yet restrained by some secret hesitation.

Miss Burchill had sent to know his wishes in regard to Cora's music. Would he be willing to have her receive instruction at the residence of Professor Clarmont? and the answer was an unqualified assent, and

a strongly expressed desire that Miss Burchill would use her own judgment in every particular.

“He is very kind,” said Mildred, secretly reproaching herself for her old unaccountable dislike of the factory owner.

“Yes, he is very good,” echoed Cora, who had heard the remark, “and” as if she were soliloquizing, “I ought to love him, but—” She seemed to remember herself, and looking up, continued with a blush, “I *do* love him, because he is my poor, dear mamma’s brother.”

Her words touched a responsive chord in Miss Burchill’s heart. Was not *her* affection given to some one for a similar cause?

The musical instruction at Professor Clarmont’s was immediately begun, Mildred always accompanying her pupil, and the little Frenchman was delighted at meeting again his old promising scholar. In his delight and his belief in her vocal ability, he would have resumed his lessons to her for a mere nominal amount, but her heart was still too sore from its recent bereavements to allow her to take up immediately a study that had given so much enjoyment to the dear ones who had gone. To satisfy the little professor, however, she consented to sing one of her old pieces on the conclusion of each of Cora’s lessons. Mrs. Phillips was not long in learning of their tri-weekly visits to Clarmont’s and she changed the hour of her own lesson so that it might immediately precede theirs; then she waited in an adjoining room,

where she heard all that Mildred sang. On the occasion of Cora's third lesson she not only waited for the conclusion of Miss Burchill's song, but she lingered to meet the two. Half stifling Cora with a caress, she also extended a hand to Mildred:

"Miss Burchill, from all that I have heard of you, I am so delighted that you are dear little Cora's governess. Mr. Robinson told me how much satisfaction you gave."

Miss Burchill bowed slightly, and seemed anxious to depart, but Mrs. Phillips retained Cora's hand.

"I am going to give myself the pleasure of walking home with you," she said. "Do you know, you naughty girl," pinching Cora's cheek, "that you have neglected me since Miss Burchill came to you? You have not been once to visit me, and when your uncle stopped the other afternoon, he said it was quite out of the question to get you away from your governess during the day. So to punish you, I am going all the way home with you. I must see the sanctum in which Miss Burchill and you seclude yourselves, and perhaps I shall induce Miss Burchill to give *me* lessons in something," with an arch, pretty look at Mildred, as if she rated Miss Burchill's scholastic attainments far above her own.

Thus lightly talking, and paying the most flattering attentions to the governess, she did accompany them home, and insist with playful freedom, on seeing their sanctum, as she called the room in which Mildred

instructed her pupil. When there, she professed to be delighted, turning over Cora's books, and examining all her apparatus for study with the enjoyment of a vivacious child. Certainly, Miss Burchill had never seen any one so lovely, and, despite a secret aversion which she could neither banish nor quite account for, the charm of that incomparably beautiful face, with its artless expression, was not without its effect upon her.

Mrs. Phillips paused over a voluminous history that she had picked up, and in a minute danced to Miss Burchill.

"Will you," she said, fastening her hands in a pretty, coaxing fashion on Mildred's arm, "allow me to come here every day or two and read history with you? You know, owing to papa's reverses, my education had to suffer somewhat, and, while I may have a smattering of the more elegant things, I am, no doubt, sadly deficient in what I should know. Will you, Miss Burchill?" as the latter was about to utter some disclaimer. "It will be a useful break in the monotony of my life; it will be something to keep away harrowing thoughts, for I have suffered so deeply."

She changed at once to a most touching picture of sorrow,—her head drooped, her eyes down, even her lips trembling as if it needed but a word to make her grief burst forth. And Mildred, touched in spite of herself, gave a less qualified answer than she otherwise might have done:

“Mr. Robinson was her employer; she did not know that such a disposition of her time would meet his approval.”

Mrs. Phillips obviated the difficulty at once; she would see Mr. Robinson that very instant, and she departed to do so, leaving Mildred dissatisfied with herself, secretly annoyed, and not a little puzzled that she should be the object of such warm attention on the part of the beautiful and wealthy young widow.

Her perplexity was rather increased when Cora asked, almost as soon as the door had closed on Mrs. Phillips:

“Do *you* like her?”

There was such a determined emphasis on the second word of the question, and such a penetrating, eager look of the child's eyes on Miss Burchill's face, that Miss Burchill herself felt obliged to pause before giving a reply. The little girl waited without the least diminution of her penetrating look.

“I have not yet seen enough of Mrs. Phillips to give a decided opinion,” was the answer at last; “and besides it is our duty to dislike no one.”

“No one?” said the little girl. “Not even if you can't help a creeping feeling coming over you against a person? if you can't help thinking that a person isn't true, that they don't mean just what they say?”

“Yes; even if we experience all that,” answered

Mildred; "and we have no right to think anybody untrue just on our own suspicions or feelings."

"Well what would *you* do if you had just that feeling for a person? if you felt every time they touched you just like jumping away from them, and telling them you didn't want them near you? and if, every time they spoke and said such nice things, and seemed to think so much of you, you felt like saying to them they didn't mean it, and it was all just lies they were telling?"

"In that case," said Mildred, gravely and gently, "I should try to find out all the nice, lovable qualities of such a person, and in constantly keeping those before my mind I should be likely to forget much that I disliked. But in any event, I ought to exert my will in such a manner that all aversion must be kept down; then also, it would be my duty to seize opportunities of being kind to such a person."

The child's face fell.

"And do you think," she said sorrowfully, "that I ought to do all this with Mrs. Phillips? I don't know why, but I *do* dislike her."

"Yes, Cora; we know no evil of her, and we must think her very good and treat her accordingly."

So when Mrs. Phillips returned, armed with Robinson's cordial permission to read daily with Miss Burchill, she found herself quite kindly received by the governess and her pupil. And the widow did not fail

to come a single day, and she availed herself of every opportunity to ingratiate herself with Miss Burchill; actually making secret studies of the character of Mildred, so that she might deport herself accordingly. She affected a horror of all fibbing, on more than one occasion inventing little instances in which her own truthfulness, having been put to severe test came out triumphantly, and relating the whole in a brief, unaffected way that seemed quite natural and simple. She was full of sympathy for the poor, asking all sorts of questions about the residents of the humbler part of the village, and quaintly wondering if their delicacy would be wounded should she make some charitable visits among them.

She loved retirement. Was there not ample evidence of that in the fact, that though the midwinter influx of visitors to "The Castle" had already set in, she had so far refused every invitation to make one of them. The company of Miss Burchill and Cora afforded her, to use her own gushing words, "repose and enjoyment."

Miss Burchill was somewhat won by it all, and when occasionally there came strange thoughts regarding Mrs. Phillips' old engagement to Thurston, and she wondered whether that engagement had been justly and honorably severed by Miss Brower, she was accustomed to silence her doubts with the very reasoning she had used with her pupil. She knew no positive evil of the young widow. Why, then should she doubt her? And, thus

throwing the mantle of her own tender charity over every suspicion, she continued to receive Mrs. Phillips with gentle kindness, and to inculcate in her pupil the same gentle, forgiving, tender goodness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. PHILLIPS executed her project of visiting the poor. Dressed in the plainest of her sombre dresses, she passed an entire morning in calling at the homes in which Mildred had told her the greatest poverty existed, but her first care had been to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Hogan, for Miss Burchill had told her of the poor woman's kindness to herself. Little did Mildred dream, when she gave that information, how it whetted Mrs. Phillips' desire to see Mrs. Hogan in order to satisfy her own secret suspicions. And the poor, simple woman was readily enough beguiled into conversation by the charming young widow. She told, with little effort to draw her out, all that she knew of Miss Burchill, and speaking of her brought her naturally enough to tell of the kindness of Gerald Thurston, both to herself and to Miss Burchill; and Mrs. Phillips' heart beat wildly while she heard, and her cheeks reddened from secret emotions of jealousy and anger, but when she spoke it was in the same sweet, low, gentle tones which she had first assumed.

"And Mr. Thurston continues his kindness to you, does he not? Of course he visits you?" she said.

“He goes to the shop once in a while to see Dick, but Dick is doing so well now that we can get along without Mr. Thurston’s help at present.”

There being no more to learn in reference either to Miss Burchill or Thurston, Mrs. Phillips took her leave, promising to come in often to see Mrs. Hogan, and leaving with her so generous a souvenir of her visit that the poor woman was quite overwhelmed. She had ascertained the names of a few of the poorest families, and these also she visited, promising in the case of one where there was illness, to send some delicacies from home, and all the time her face wore its most captivating expression and her voice kept its sweetest tones, while inwardly she was filled with weariness and disgust. But Gerald might—nay, there was every possibility that he would—hear of her charitable visitations; thus he would know there was also that in her character which she felt, or rather feared, that he admired in Miss Burchill, and that was motive sufficient to make her trample on her heart, if necessary.

Miss Balk, seeing Mrs. Phillips’ preparations for her charitable visits and not knowing the object, looked on with grim wonder. Jellies, sweetmeats, even soups, were put up, and the basket intrusted to the servant, while the widow without a word to Barbara, followed. But the latter followed the widow, and having ascertained the quarter to which she had gone, she readily enough understood the rest. Her lips came together

with their usual snap, and her keen eyes sparkled, but she did not accost Helen about it until evening.

"How soon will Gerald Thurston know that you have turned Sister of Charity?" she said suddenly.

"And how do *you* know that I have done so?" was the retort:

"I followed you this morning to learn the destination of the basket you gave Lida."

"You are a mean, sneaking spy, Barbara Balk."

"And you are an artful hypocrite, Mrs. Phillips."

"How dare you pry into my business the way you do?"

"Because your hypocrisy amuses me. You are so short-sighted that you fail utterly to see how impossible it is for your little games to win. Thurston has too much character ever to recover from his disgust at your perfidy. But scheme on, Mrs. Phillips, flutter around the flame of your own vanity until it consumes you."

Helen scarcely heard the last word; she had hurried from the room, violently slamming the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE midwinter visitors had gone from Robinson's, and the early springtime, with its fresh green fragrance, had come. It was the season of the year which Mildred most enjoyed, and were it not for the persistent and constant company of Mrs. Phillips she would have been quite happy. That little lady might almost have taken up her residence in The Castle, so many hours daily did she spend there. Her secret hope of meeting Thurston was disappointed; neither he nor Robinson were ever seen by any chance in the part of the house or the grounds to which Miss Burchill and her pupil chose to confine themselves.

One afternoon when all three were returning from Professor Clarmont's, Mrs. Phillips suggested that instead of entering the grounds by the narrow pedestrian path they always took, they should follow the carriage road, the high gate of which, contrary to the custom, stood open. Cora, too, favored the proposition, and Mildred, knowing they could swerve into a secluded spot before they reached the house should it become necessary, consented. The widow seemed animated by

some spirit of playful mischief. No sooner had they crossed the boundary that separated the carriage-way from the main road than she sprang on the paling of the gate, challenging Cora to the same feat. As there was no one in sight, Miss Burchill would not check her pupil's vivacity, and the girl, catching the spirit of active mirth, jumped up beside Mrs. Phillips. They swung to and fro for some minutes, laughing at the odd sport, and finally closed the gate. Then all three pursued their way, not one of them seeming to think that they ought, perhaps, to leave the gate as they found it, or not deeming it necessary to do so, as the lodge-keeper would probably attend to it. Having proceeded a little distance, they heard the sound of swift, almost furious driving. A curve in the road hid the vehicle, and in an instant Mildred thought of the closed gate. Possibly it had been left open for the egress of this vehicle, driven at such a rapid rate that the driver might be unable to check his horse in time. With a hurried cry of "The gate!" to her companions she dashed back by the road they had come. It was a vehicle furiously driven, the horse either having taken fright or having become unmanageable through temper, and the driver being utterly unable, though he strained every nerve, to check the pace of the animal. Mrs. Phillips and Cora fled with terrified screams to the side of the road, the former in her fright not recognizing Thurston in the driver, while Mildred, having reached the gate, swung

it open, but too late to escape herself. The vehicle dashed through, knocking her down and rendering her insensible. Thurston saw the accident, but was unable to stop his horse until parties in the road caught the mettlesome beast; then he returned to find Mrs. Phillips and Cora bending over Mildred. The gate-keeper was also on the scene, apologizing for his absence at the time of the accident, but insisting that he had left the gate open while he went to perform a brief errand. Mrs. Phillips was in no hurry to tell how she had been the means of closing it, but Cora spoke up, her eyes full of tears.

“Yes, it was open, but Mrs. Phillips and I swung on it and shut it.”

All this time Gerald did not notice his stepmother; indeed, he seemed utterly oblivious of her presence, giving his whole attention to the unconscious girl at his feet.

“We must send to the house for a litter of some sort,” he said, addressing himself to the gate-keeper, who had brought water and vinegar and a sponge, all that he could think of in the way of restoratives.

Miss Burchill was recovering. She opened her eyes, and seeing who was above her she blushed violently.

“You are better, Miss Burchill?” asked Gerald gently, but with such a concern in his tones that it made Mrs. Phillips sick for a moment.

“Much better,” she answered, but the tone of her

voice indicated weakness still, and sitting up, she continued, "I think I can walk to the house now."

Her effort was futile, for as soon as she attempted to stand she discovered that one foot was badly sprained.

Gerald turned to Helen; it was his first recognition of her:

"Will you be kind enough to go to the house and summon help? They can bring one of the easy summer chairs; in that way we can get our sufferer home."

Did he single her out for the errand in order to free himself of her presence? Mrs. Phillips felt it to be so, and, while she raged secretly, outwardly she responded by a most charming smile of assent and instantaneous departure on the errand.

The gate-keeper brought a chair, and as Thurston assisted to place Mildred comfortably upon it, he said regretfully.

"I am the cause of your hurt, and I am under an obligation to you. Were it not for your forethought in running to open the gate, my neck might have been in jeopardy. The horse is one which Mr. Robinson has recently bought; he was anxious for me to try him, but I had no idea he had so much mettle in him."

"I did not know that it was for you I opened the gate," answered Mildred; "but since it is so, I am glad, for I owe you a deep obligation. I feel it is through you I have my present home."

"Is it a pleasant one? Are you quite happy?" and

Gerald looked for an instant into her eyes, and seemed to await quite eagerly her answer.

“The home is a very pleasant one,” she answered.

“But are you happy?” he persisted. “Do you suffer from any intrusion?” as if he divined why she did not answer his second question.

“I ought not to permit myself to suffer from anything,” she answered, evasively, and with a smile; “since so pleasant a home has been given me, I should be content to sacrifice my own feelings on many occasions.”

There was no opportunity then for the reply he was about to make, for Mrs. Phillips arrived, followed by a couple of servants bearing a large easy-chair. Mildred was gently seated in it, and with Thurston on one side and Helen and Cora on the other, she was borne to the house. The sprain proved to be very tedious, confining its victim to her room for weeks, and affording a golden opportunity for Mrs. Phillips to take up her residence at The Castle under pretence of most affectionate concern for the young governess. She refused to leave her, and Mildred shut her teeth a little hard in her effort to keep back an indignant protest against the widow's persistent attentions. Accustomed as she was to self-sacrifice, for the sake of showing a gentle, kindly example to her pupil, the effort, after the first desperate struggle, became less hard.

Thurston and Robinson sent every day kind messages

to Miss Burchill, and frequently there was a choice bouquet, accompanied by the compliments of Gerald. How Mrs. Phillips' heart beat as she saw those flowers and knew for whom they were; how blinding tears of rage and jealousy filled her eyes as she caught their odor, and how she could have throttled Mildred as she saw the young girl bend above them with a blush of pleasure.

The season for Mr. Robinson's gay summer party of friends had arrived, and the part of the house in which apartments were usually assigned them resounded with the work of painters and upholsterers. On the very day on which they were expected, Thurston was surprised to receive a note from his old friend Rodney.

"Don't be surprised," the note ran, "to see me up at your place this evening. Frank Hutchins, the same from whom I obtained the letter introducing you to Robinson, insists on my accompanying him and the rest of the party that go up to 'The Castle' every summer. He says old Robinson gives them all a capital time, and a carte-blanche to make any addition to the party they desire. Now as I have a great wish to see how you are looking, Gerald, after these two years, I shall avail myself of the invitation. And Frank tells me that your charming stepmother made one of Robinson's gay party last summer. Do you think the old man would like to make her Mrs. Robinson? Miller says he can't

understand Mrs. Phillips' mode of living, shutting herself up in the same little old country dwelling—you see he has to make annual visits to her in order to regulate business matters—she lived in when she was poor, and spending scarcely anything of her immense fortune. How do you meet her, Gerald, or do you keep as shady as Frank says you did last winter when all the company was up there? He says he never caught a glimpse of you. If you do that now, Gerald, I shall think that your heart isn't cured yet. Widows stick, my boy, like plasters sometimes.

“In any event be ready to greet me this evening.

“Yours as ever,

“RODNEY.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

“Not going down to the parlor, with all that music making your ears itch, and our host himself in jollier mood than I ever thought he could be from his face. Why, Gerald, I shall begin to think you’re a lovelorn swain after all, and that your stepmother’s face hasn’t lost its hold on your heart.”

Gerald smiled a little scornfully, not taking the trouble to utter any disclaimer, knowing Rodney’s propensity to joke if it was possible on all affairs, grave or gay, and Rodney continued.

“Come now, Gerald; none of this folly while I am here,” and catching the sound of a manly foot passing the door, accompanied by a gay strain in a manly voice, he suddenly interrupted himself to rush to the corridor, and forced the passer-by to enter. “Here, Frank, use your powers of persuasiveness to get Thurston downstairs. We’re to have all sorts of jolly things: music, vocal and instrumental,”—imitating the accents of a stage crier announcing the items on a programme of amusement,—parties for euchre and parties for whist, rum stories and stories without rum, courting parties and parties who don’t pay court to anybody,” with a

significant glance at Gerald. "Is it not all so, Frank?" addressing the newcomer, a tall, handsome man of thirty-five or forty. The newcomer assented, and immediately began also in so bantering a strain that Gerald, in sheer desperation as to how he should escape from his jocose tormentors, agreed to join them in the parlor that evening.

Accordingly, an hour later found him in the parlor, mingling with the guests with that easy courtesy which marks the genial and well-bred man. Robinson evinced both surprise and delight at his presence, making jocular allusions to the retirement which Gerald had affected in the past, and declaring now that he knew what a thoroughly good fellow he was in society, he must make one of the gay company while they stayed. And Gerald somewhat won by the cordial festivity about him, an atmosphere to which he was long unused, did not entirely refuse.

Not a sound of the evening's entertainment reached the apartments occupied by Mildred and her pupil, and though both knew of the arrival of the visitors, neither seemed anxious to mingle in any of the sports. Even though Cora knew many of the guests from the intercourse with them which her uncle formerly insisted upon, she did not express the slightest desire to see them. Mrs. Phillips, however, though in the presence of Miss Burchill affecting the same unconcern, was far from being so indifferent. On one of her daily visits

she contrived to waylay a servant, and by skilfully put questions ascertained that Thurston really made one of the gay party in the evenings. That decided her. She must be near him, within sight of him, even though it was but to bring upon herself his scorn. Making an excuse for calling upon Mr. Robinson she affected to be much concerned for the isolation of Cora. The little girl had no society, and now, while there was company in the house, it seemed cruel not to insist that she should come into the parlor in the evenings. Of course while Miss Burchill, to whom Cora was so strongly attached, courted such strict seclusion, it was natural the latter would also incline to it. But if Mr. Robinson would insist upon his niece joining the company, Mrs. Phillips would sacrifice her feelings on the matter of retirement for the sake of chaperoning the little girl.

“Suppose I request Miss Burchill to come too?” said the factory owner. “She’s been here more’n a year, and them feelings about secludin’ herself mayn’t be quite so strong now.”

“Oh, dear no, Mr. Robinson!” answered Helen, who would have fainted at the prospect of Mildred appearing in the parlor; “it wouldn’t be a bit of use. Indeed, I think such a request would make her positively unhappy.”

“Oh, well then, I wouldn’t do anything to make her unhappy, and you jist tell Cora that I want her in the parlor this evening with you.”

And Mrs. Phillips went directly to Miss Burchill and announced that she had met Mr. Robinson, and the result of that meeting was a request for her to bring Cora to the parlor that evening, the request being put in such a manner that it seemed like a duty to fulfil it.

“And I spoke of you, dear Miss Burchill,” she continued in the same affectionately confiding manner which she always assumed with Mildred, “urging upon Mr. Robinson the propriety of your accompanying Cora, but he said he would not for anything disturb that which he so admired in you,—your love of seclusion.”

To which Miss Burchill answered nothing. But when evening came, Cora herself demurred, and it required all the gentle persuasion of Mildred to win her consent at last.

Mrs. Phillips looked radiant; her dress of pure white material was unrelieved by any color, or even trimmings, save the filmy lace which covered her neck and arms. With her dark hair and exquisite complexion she seemed like some brilliant picture, as she entered Miss Burchill's room to await the coming of Cora, and the governess for an instant was conscious of something very like a throb of envy. Cora wore white also, and though by the side of Mrs. Phillips she appeared somewhat plain, seen by herself she seemed almost handsome.

There was a gracefulness about the beautiful widow which made her motions as delightful to watch as it was to gaze upon her face, and being known to many of the

guests from her introduction to them the previous summer, she was entirely free from any embarrassment. Surrounded immediately, she found herself the object of attention in some measure from every one save Thurston. He merely bowed to her, and with so grave and distant an air that it cut her to the heart. She manœuvred to get near him, and for that purpose encouraged the attentions of Hutchins, rather more than the other gentlemen, for she had noticed that Gerald seemed more intimate with Hutchins. She recognized Rodney, and even attempted to fascinate him, but he appeared to regard her efforts in that direction much as one might the antics of an unknown and somewhat to be feared animal. Once he said in an undertone to Gerald when the charming widow seemed to be carrying all hearts,—

“She is a beautiful little devil, Gerald, I wouldn’t be surprised, and I wouldn’t blame you much, if your heart wandered that way yet.”

Rodney never forgot the look which accompanied Gerald’s answer,—a look so fraught with pain and horror.

“My heart to wander to her yet,—my father’s murderer and destroyer of my own happiness? I tell you, Rodney, I hate her.”

Mrs. Phillips manœuvred so successfully that she did on one occasion obtain a seat next to Gerald, between him and Hutchins; but what was her mortification to

have the former quietly leave it, and devote himself to little Cora Horton in a distant part of the room? She was asked to sing, but begged to be excused, as she had not sung in company since her widowhood; and all this was said with the very prettiest affectation of tender melancholy. Most of the company knew that she was the widow of Thurston's father, the whole strange story having gone the rounds on their previous summer visit, when Robinson introduced her; but no one of them dreamed that there was any deeper history relative to herself and Gerald. So while they wondered that Thurston was so little impressed by a beauty and charm of manner which in their own case was resistless, they fancied they understood it. The fact that she was his father's widow, and in possession of wealth which might otherwise be his, was sufficient to account for his distant demeanor.

When the gay party separated, each to the apartment assigned, Mrs. Phillips, who, during the evening, had been solicited by Robinson to make The Castle her home while the visitors remained, repaired to the apartment given her. She entered it with emotions which well-nigh stifled her. All her beauty and all her art had failed to win even one pleasant recognition from Gerald.

At that same moment Gerald was asking Robinson:

"Why was not Miss Burchill in the parlor with Cora?"

"Miss Burchill! Why, Mrs. Phillips told me that it

wouldn't be no use asking her, she's so deuced fond of seclusion and all that. I wanted to have her down, but the little widow seemed to think I'd make Miss Burchill unhappy if I asked her."

Gerald bit his lip, and looked as if he was trying to restrain some unpleasant speech.

"I'd like to have Miss Burchill meet the company well enough," pursued Robinson. "She's a pooty girl, if she isn't so pooty as the widow, and I don't want her to hide herself the way she does. Jist you ask her down to-morrow night, Gerald."

The next morning Mildred received a note from Thurston, respectfully but warmly requesting her in the name of Mr. Robinson to join the company that evening.

"I also, Miss Burchill," the note continued, "shall be delighted to have you accede to the request. I could not but think last evening, when I saw your little charge, of your loneliness in your secluded part of the house, indeed, I was much surprised to find that you had not accompanied her; but, expecting to have the pleasure of meeting you this evening,

"I remain

"Yours sincerely,

"GERALD THURSTON."

Mildred smiled and blushed with pleasure, and when

Mrs. Phillips came dancing in, preparatory to a descent to breakfast with the guests, Miss Burchill innocently told her of Thurston's note.

It became necessary for the widow to adjust such a portion of her dress as required her to turn her face away from Miss Burchill. By that means her changing color and expression were unseen. When she turned back there was not a trace of her baneful emotions, and she said, with her wonted sweetness:

"Mr. Robinson will not enforce his request when you answer the note, stating your insurmountable objection to join the company. If you will write it immediately, addressing it to Mr. Thurston, I can give it to him before he goes to the factory."

She seized this pretext with a wild hope that it would be the means of bringing her into that contact with Gerald which she so much desired.

Cora coming in, had to be made acquainted with the matter under discussion, and she impetuously burst forth:

"Don't refuse, Miss Burchill. It will be so delightful for me to have you come; for the gentlemen all crowd around Mrs. Phillips, and she hasn't any chance to attend to me."

"You naughty girl to tell such tales," interposed Mrs. Phillips, playfully pinching the girl's cheek.

Mildred replied:

"I am not sure that it would be quite right for me to

refuse since both Mr. Robinson and Mr. Thurston are kind enough to desire it so much."

"But they will not expect you to violate your principles, my dear Miss Burchill," said Mrs. Phillips again, "once that they know——"

She was suddenly checked by meeting Cora's eyes. The latter were fixed upon her with a look so keen and penetrating that she stopped in some dismay. Did the child understand the motive of her speech? But Mildred in her abstraction was quite unconscious of any but the literal meaning of Mrs. Phillips' words, and in a few minutes, much to Cora's delight she said, with the quiet tones of one who had convincingly made up her mind:

"I shall go down to the parlor, this evening."

To the parlor accordingly the three descended that evening, Mrs. Phillips as radiant as she had been on the previous night, and Mildred looking very modest and very pretty in her simple dress. Cora had insisted upon enlivening it with natural flowers, and they seemed to add to the sweet purity of the regular features. Mrs. Phillips assumed the rôle of chaperon, and not for one instant was Mildred suffered from her side; but she conducted her espionage in such a manner that the young governess thought it sprung from genuine kindness, and she was accordingly grateful. Even when Thurston came up with his salutation, he was obliged to have Mrs. Phillips hear every word that he said.

His greeting of his stepmother had been exceedingly formal, at which Mildred wondered, and thought more persistently than ever that Helen must have inflicted some injury upon him in severing the engagement and marrying his father. But with her wonted charity she stifled the thought.

On one occasion Mrs. Phillips could not avoid being separated from Miss Burchill owing to Hutchins' attentions to herself, but as Thurston was engaged with Cora Horton in another part of the room, and Mildred was instantly monopolized by an elderly gentleman, who, having been told that she was the governess, wanted some ideas on teaching for the guidance of his own little daughter, she was not entirely dissatisfied. Handsome, infatuated Frank Hutchins would lead her to a part of the room which promised more seclusion, and as it was in the vicinity of Thurston, Mrs. Phillips willingly assented. They obtained cosy seats just in advance of Gerald and his little chatty companion, and near enough to hear every word of their conversation.

"You will ask her to sing that aria, Mr. Thurston," Cora was saying. "Why, Professor Clarmont said only the other day there was no better rendering of it on the operatic stage."

Mrs. Phillips was really faint; too well she knew of whom Cora spoke, and to have Gerald hear Miss Burchill's magnificent voice in that piece, which Helen had to acknowledge secretly she sang superbly, would have been

death to Mrs. Phillips. With an excuse to the astonished Hutchins, she hurried from him to Mildred.

“Oh, Miss Burchill,” she said, drawing the latter aside, “I have just been prevailed upon to promise to sing some time during the evening but that which I sing best happens to be the aria which you also sing. You too will probably be called upon, and I came to ask you as a special favor that you would not sing it, for should you sing before me I could not of course attempt it after, and should I precede you it would subject me to much mortification, since my voice is so inferior to yours.”

Mildred, in her simple credulousness, readily enough gave an assent. It was not much of a sacrifice, for she had not thought of being asked to display her voice. But she could not help regretting her promise when, a little after, Thurston finding her at last free from the espionage of Mrs. Phillips (the latter had returned to Hutchins) came to her and asked her to sing that very aria. She refused him as gently as she could, and without stating her reason. Gerald attributed her refusal to a possible shyness which would speedily wear off, and he contented himself in conversing with her, deriving not a little pleasure as he fathomed the richness of her mind. He had denied himself female society so long, and he had dwelt so continually with the memory of that burning wrong which one woman whom he had once adored had inflicted upon him, that Mildred with her unaffected

simplicity and candor, so full of gentleness and charity, was like a meal set before some famished one, while Mildred, never before in such congenial society, conversed with equal pleasure. In the midst of their mutual enjoyment the strains of a song broke upon their ears. It was Mrs. Phillips, who had been led to the piano by Hutchins. On her return to him she had so managed that, despite her positive refusal to sing on the previous evening, he had again requested to hear her, and she sang the aria that Thurston had solicited from Mildred. The latter started as she heard it, and slightly changed color. Gerald noted both; it seemed to give him a sudden divination. He bent toward Mildred and asked:

“Did you know that,”—he would not pronounce his father’s name, and so he hesitated for an instant—“that lady was going to sing that piece when I requested it from you?”

Always truthful, Mildred answered in the affirmative, but she blushed violently while she did so.

“Pardon me, Miss Burchill, if I put one more question. Did she tell you she was going to sing it?”

Again Mildred was obliged to answer in the affirmative, and Gerald made no further remark, but he fancied he quite understood it. Mrs. Phillips’ performance was greeted by very flattering applause, and before the latter had quite subsided, Gerald bent again to Mildred and said:

“I want you to do me a favor, Miss Burchill. I want you to sing something. Come, I shall lead you to the piano.” And Mrs. Phillips, as she left the instrument, leaning gracefully on the arm of Hutchins, was greeted by the sight of Miss Burchill on the arm of Thurston, and in a few moments after by the sound of Miss Burchill’s magnificent voice. Clear, loud, and ravishingly sweet, it filled the room, and invested the simple ballad she had chosen with an exquisite charm. Mrs. Phillips could not listen to it; she must suffocate if she heard another note, and telling Hutchins she felt ill, he took her out to one of the broad piazzas.

The applause which greeted Miss Burchill’s effort was rapturous, and the company pressed about her for another song. When at length, she left the piano, leaning upon Gerald’s arm, it was with a complexion so bright from blushes of pleasure that it well-nigh rivaled Mrs. Phillips’, and the blushes became deeper when Gerald whispered:

“Regard me always as your true friend, Miss Burchill, and do not hesitate to call upon me for any assistance.”

With a thankful and delighted heart she went to her rest that night, while at scarcely the distance of a corridor another woman went to her rest weeping copious tears of jealousy and rage.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS BURCHILL came to make regularly one of the gay party every evening, and Thurston seemed positively to watch for opportunities in which he could snatch, as it were, Mildred from Mrs. Phillips, the latter being as persistent in her espionage of the governess as ever. One evening there was discussed the feasibility of a moonlight ride in a coach to one of the villages fifteen miles distant from Eastbury. There being no dissenting voice, the date was soon fixed. Gerald watched an opportunity to whisper to Mildred:

“Remember, that I claim you as my partner.” That was all he had time to say, for Mrs. Phillips was upon them.

“And with whom are *you* to ride, Miss Burchill?” the widow asked on the very next morning after the arrangements had been completed.

“With Mr. Thurston.”

“Ah!” The interjection was a sort of vent for the agony with which she heard the announcement. “And with whom,” she continued, trying to laugh, but almost failing in the attempt, “do you think *I* am to ride?”

“With Mr. Hutchins, I suppose, judging from the

marked attentions he pays you," answered Mildred, with a smile.

"No, indeed; I had to relegate him to Cora here, as I was asked first by Mr. Robinson. So, I am going to ride with him. And now, Milly dear," latterly having taken to calling Miss Burchill by a pet diminutive, "what wrap are you going to wear? I really have nothing suitable, and I want you to advise me what to have made up."

"I have nothing but this," said Mildred bringing forth an ample black cape with a hood attached; the latter could be drawn over the head in such a manner as to conceal much of the features.

"Just the thing," said Mrs. Phillips, "and I should have remembered it, for you have worn it every evening that we have gone down to the lake. Will you let me take it for a pattern? and I can have mine made up immediately."

"Certainly," assented Mildred, and the widow sent that very day to Boston an order for a cape on Miss Burchill's pattern. It came home to her entire satisfaction, and as she surveyed herself in the glass she smiled triumphantly. Her height and the proportions of her figure were so like those of Mildred that, with her features fairly concealed by the hood, she might be taken with little difficulty for the governess. Her plan was scarcely defined in her own mind, nor had she much hope of carrying it out did she form it; but in any case,

she was ready to take advantage of any fortunate accident.

The evening arrived, and though the moon coquetishly hid herself, it was confidently expected that she would appear before the party started; all was delighted bustle in the apartments of the ladies, and gay voices and bursts of laughter whetted even the servants' appetites for the fun, as the latter passed through the corridors. Mrs. Phillips was constantly flitting from her own room to that of Mildred; now assisting the latter to dress, now coming for an opinion on some part of her own costume, and all the time so full of vivacity that Cora, and even Miss Burchill, caught something of the gay spirit and laughed heartily at her mirthful sallies.

But she contrived to be very tedious in the making of her toilet, and to delay also the toilet of the governess. Cora was ready and impatiently waiting long before even Mrs. Phillips' hair was quite arranged; and she was urged to go down, which persuasion she obeyed when she found, at length, that there was little prospect of her companions being ready very soon, owing to the widow's constantly increasing need of Miss Burchill's assistance. Hardly had she gone when a message from Thurston was brought to Miss Burchill, desiring the latter, when she was ready, to come to the porch at the back of the house. The message further explained that, as one of the horses seemed too ill to be taken out, it became necessary for some one to ride the mettlesome

animal which so nearly had cost a life a few months before. His spirit was much broken by this time, but there still remained in him a vicious peculiarity: driven immediately from the stable he was manageable enough, but allowed to wait in the near vicinity of the other horses he was sure to return to his old freaks. As Gerald has thus far broken the animal's spirit, and understood him thoroughly, he had not the least fear to drive him on this occasion. Miss Burchill was requested to come to the back of the house, because thence a short path led to the stable, and the moon, now fulfilling the hopes of the party and shining brilliantly, would reveal her to Gerald, who would wait at the stable door. He could then drive up, seat her instantaneously in the wagon and follow the rest of the party, all of which explanatory message Mrs. Phillips also heard.

She pretended to assist Mildred, while in an incredibly short time, considering her previous slowness, she was herself quite ready; and as Miss Burchill could find neither gloves nor handkerchief, though positive that she had left both on her dressing-table, and as the fastening of her cape, much to her surprise, was suddenly discovered to hang by a single thread, and her hair, which Mrs. Phillips had arranged, threatened to tumble about her shoulders, the widow said gently:

"Had I not better go down, dear, and apologize to Mr. Thurston for so unfortunately detaining him, and also appease Mr. Robinson's impatience?"

Mildred assented, and the widow swiftly descended, muffling her face on the way so that her features could not be well detected, and feeling in her pocket to be assured of the safety of Mildred's gloves and handkerchief. The broad back porch contained no one, and she stood fearlessly in the moonlight, confident that Gerald would mistake her for Mildred. Her only anxiety was lest Miss Burchill should descend before Thurston could drive off: but then she was confident about the tumbling of Miss Burchill's hair, she having arranged it in such loose coils that the whole must come down with any prolonged or rapid movement of the head. Gerald intent alone upon the skilful management of his horse, did little more than assure himself that there was a woman's form on the porch. He drove up; Helen was beside him in a moment, and the chaise was rapidly driven on.

Mildred could scarcely control her temper. It seemed as if annoyances accumulated. It required time to get a fresh supply of gloves and a handkerchief, and time to secure the fastening of her cape, while to complete her vexation, her hair at the last moment came tumbling about her shoulders. How she regretted having yielded to Mrs. Phillips' solicitations that she should be permitted to arrange it, but regret could not avail her now, and trying to be patient she made all possible haste.

She was ready at last, and with her heart beating high with pleasant anticipation, she descended to the

back porch. The moon shone brightly enough, and she could see the stable very plainly, but nothing else; there was no sign of Gerald or the wagon. Wondering much, and with a vague presentiment of disappointment, she descended the steps and approached the stable. One of the hostlers met her:

“Looking for Mr. Thurston, miss? He drove off not ten minutes ago.”

Drove off! Then, perhaps tired of waiting he had gone after all to the front of the house, and to the front of the house she hurried. Sure enough, a chaise was there, and a tall form pacing back and forth, but the form was that of Robinson.

“Methusala!” the factory owner’s customary exclamation when aroused by any unusual emotion. “What’s the matter, and where’s Mrs. Phillips? I was jist going to send up for her, and why ain’t you to the back of the house? Gerald’s waiting there.”

“I have been there, and one of the hostlers told me that Mr. Thurston had already driven off. Mrs. Phillips came down a quarter of an hour ago; she said she would apologize to Mr. Thurston for my detention.”

Mildred was very pale as she spoke, but that might be owing to the moonlight falling full upon her face, and her voice trembled a little.

“Whew!” ejaculated Robinson, prolonging the interjection until it sounded like a whistle. “The little widow must have gone off with him. Pooty nice treat-

ment for me, and pooty nice treatment for you. But we'll fix 'em; jist you git into the wagon with me, and we'll ketch up to them."

"If you please I would rather be excused. Indeed, as I feel now, I am unable to take the ride. But do not let me longer detain *you*, Mr. Robinson; I shall return to my room."

She turned to do so but his voice stopped her:

"Miss Burchill!"

She was struck by the peculiar tone with which he pronounced her name. It was so beseeching and agitated, and when she looked at him there was a fiery crimson spot on each yellow wrinkled cheek.

"I ain't sorry that we're left, for it gives me a chance to say something to you, and I don't care about the drive, anyway, so long as you won't take it."

A color was beginning to come also into her face,—a color which betokened agitation and perhaps fear.

"Oh, don't be skeered. I wouldn't say anything to hurt you for the hull world; but I want you to listen to a few facts in my life. I'd have told them to you long ago if you'd given me a chance."

They were on a part of the piazza on which his study opened. Through the open window shone the wax lights, and Robinson continued, as he saw her eyes wander for an instant to the interior of the apartment:

"Come in, Miss Burchill; I can tell it to you better

inside." He pushed the casement farther back as he spoke, and, as if he did not dream that she would hesitate, waited for her to enter.

He seemed so much in earnest that she could not bear to refuse him, and, conquering her repugnance to his presence, which for the moment arose stronger than ever, she obeyed him. He drew forward a chair for her and seated himself opposite. The fiery spots on his cheeks continued to glow, and his voice became more tremulous:

"You've heered, I suppose, that I was married once. She was a pooty young girl, not much older than you be, an' we was pooty close related. She was a good deal like you; had a way of holding her head jist as you do, and that kinder made me take to you from the first; but you didn't give me any chance of showin' my likin'. I'd have been kind to you, Miss Burchill; I wanted to be kind to you, and that time your grandfather was taken and died in the jail it wa'n't my fault. Gerald told you, didn't he, that I didn't know nothin' about the right facts in the case?"

Mildred slightly bowed. Strange emotions were well-nigh overpowering her. A breeze, as if the wind had suddenly risen, swept in through the window and extinguished some of the lights near Robinson. He rose instantly.

"Come over here, Miss Burchill," repairing to a part of the room where all the lights were in full glow, and

seeming to be in strange trepidation as he took his seat. Miss Burchill mechanically followed him, but as he glanced back at the extinguished candles he rose again, and, striding to the bell, pulled it violently. "I can't go on until they are all relit," he exclaimed, and watched the door until the servant appeared.

The candles relit, he resumed:

"I've always kinder thought, Miss Burchill, that you had a sort of feelin' agin' me, and so while you've been in the house I've tried to have things agreeable. Do you find them pooty well so?"

Miss Burchill again bowed; it seemed to her, in her own trepidation, as if her very voice had gone.

"Well, I wouldn't disturb you on no account, so that you'd git to feel home-like, and to know me better. Now, Miss Burchill, I want you to marry me. You shall have everything you want—" But he could not go on, for Mildred had sprung to her feet and was saying, with an energy and determination seemingly impossible to one of her gentle character:

"Stop, Mr. Robinson! I cannot listen to such a proposal. If you persist in it I must leave your house instantly."

"Well, I won't, since you dislike it so much, but I've something else to say. Jist sit down a minute, and don't look so fierce like. I won't tetch on that subject again."

She forced herself to resume her seat, and Robinson,

with a look that wandered all over the room, and was accompanied by a shudder, said abruptly:

“Do you know who my niece, Cora Horton, is?”

He waited for a reply, seeming to gloat in the agitation into which his question had thrown Miss Burchill.

“No. Who is she?”

“Ever heerd of Chester Horton, and where he is?”

It seemed to Mildred as if she must fall from her chair, so faint, so ill did she become for a moment, but she recovered herself sufficiently to gasp:

“My mother told me.”

The factory owner smiled a smile which showed his discolored teeth, they looked odd enough, contrasted with the strange expression of his face.

“Well, Miss Burchill,” he said, “Cora is your blood relation, as well as mine. She don’t know nothin’ about Chester yet, and I don’t calc’late to let her know unless it becomes necessary. I kinder guessed you might have known something, but not enough to have understood the hull truth. There ain’t no reason for me to like Chester, nor anything that’s his’n, and I don’t like him; I hate him; but Cora’s my sister’s child, the only sister I ever had, an’ the only one that wa’n’t rough to me when I was a boy and lived to hum. I wouldn’t notice her arter she married, because that scamp put on such airs, and seemed to think I wa’n’t much more than the dirt under his feet. But he sent to me quick enough in his trouble, wantin’ me to do for his wife

and child. I gave him a pooty stinging letter back, and I wouldn't have had anything to do with any of 'em, but Mattie—that's my sister—was dyin', and she sent for me. Somehow, I couldn't git over her message; it fired me up so on old times, and I went.

“ She was dyin' fast; hadn't much more'n strength to ask me to take Cora, and I took her. There was a bundle of old letters that came along with Cora, an' it wa'n't till I read them, jist a couple of months ago, that I found out the Hortons had anything to do with you. Now, I think, Miss Burchill, we understand each other pooty good, and I don't believe you'll mind stayin' with Cora. Each on you has a good home, and I don't calc'late on disturbin' you any more about the marriage question. An' I don't calc'late on tellin' anybody what's passed between us to-night.”

He rose as he spoke, as if he considered the interview ended, and Mildred also arose. But how suddenly he had changed! The crimson spots no longer glowed on his cheeks, instead they were lividly pale, and his eyes had an expression as if they saw something visible alone to them. They were fixed on a part of the room back of Mildred, and in another instant he presented such a picture of terror that she turned affrightedly to discover the cause. There was nothing, scarce a shadow, the lights being so numerous and bright, but still the factory owner continued to gaze, while his knees shook and the perspiration broke out in great clammy drops upon his

face. His lips moved, but no sound came from them, and at length, as if what had excited his terror had passed away, he sank into a chair, drawing a long breath of relief and slowly resuming his wonted appearance.

Mildred was well-nigh as frightened as he was, but she conquered her alarm sufficiently to ask if he were ill. He looked up at her and smiled,—the same smile which sat so oddly upon him before:

“Was *you* skeered? I get these spells pooty often, but they don’t amount to nothin’; reckon my nerves need fixin’ up. Going to your room, Miss Burchill? Well, good-night! I’ll take a turn out on the grounds.”

He seemed anxious to get away from the apartment, and without even waiting to have Mildred fairly gone, he dashed out on the piazza and down the steps into the moon-illuminated path.

Miss Burchill ascended to her room the prey of emotions the strangest and almost the unhappiest she had ever known. At one moment came bitter thoughts of Mrs. Phillips. How could she go with Thurston when she knew it was not for her he waited? But, then, Thurston must have been a party to the change, otherwise how could he have taken Mrs. Phillips to be his partner in the drive?

The next instant Robinson’s proposal sickened and, in some measure, daunted her. How could she remain in his house after that? But Cora and the new and

strong reasons for regarding the little girl came before her, and subdued the impulse to leave "The Castle." After that arose a frightened remembrance of Robinson's strange aspect of terror. It brought to her mind Cora's remarkable conduct when she returned from her evening visits to her uncle. Was it that the girl saw on each occasion Robinson's "spell" as he had called it? Unable to satisfy herself on any of the puzzling questions, she fell asleep at last, her pillow wet with the tears wrung from her by her strange, and perchance soon to be unhappy position.

CHAPTER XXXI.

COMPELLED at first to give his whole attention to the horse, Gerald was unable to turn to his companion, until he had driven a considerable distance out on the road. The other wagons were so much in advance of them that not one was in sight.

“Are you comfortably seated, Miss Burchill?” he said at last, slackening the horse’s pace somewhat, and turning to the form beside him.

“Very comfortably seated, dear Gerald,” at the same time throwing back the hood from her face and putting her hand upon his arm.

He sprang from her as if she had shot him, well-nigh dropping the reins as he did so.

“How came *you* here, and where is Miss Burchill?” he asked, as soon as his astonishment and rage allowed him his voice.

“Oh, Gerald, listen to me! Miss Burchill told me to go to the back piazza to you. She has gone with Mr. Robinson. You will find her at the hotel when we arrive.”

He would have ended the drive there and then, but he dared not stop until he could stable his horse, neither could he turn the animal about in the somewhat narrow

road they were pursuing, for that attempt might but bring on the very skittishness of the uncertain beast.

So he was obliged to proceed. He would not believe what Mrs. Phillips said,—somehow he doubted everything which fell from her lips,—but still in her words there was a sharper sting than he thought a woman ever again could give him. And what if it were really so, that Mildred had sent the widow in her place, and gone herself with Robinson? Under the maddening sense produced by the thought, he whipped up his horse as if there were a devil in him which would rouse the devil in the animal, and they dashed on at a speed that made Helen shriek and endeavor to cling to his arm. He flung her off.

“Oh, Gerald,” she cried, “will nothing touch you? Must I carry your unforgiveness to my grave?”

“You sent my father to *his* grave, madam,” was the stern reply.

“But I have repented; and oh, Gerald, I cannot live with the weight of your anger upon me. I ask nothing but your forgiveness, your friendliness. Forgive me! forgive me!”

“Ask heaven for forgiveness, madam.”

Gerald spurred his horse anew, taking a shorter road than he knew the others were pursuing, and turning an utterly deaf ear to her passionate entreaties. She sobbed aloud, but he was as little impressed; when they arrived at the country hotel in which supper had

been ordered for the party his horse was flecked with foam, and her beautiful eyes were red and swollen from weeping. The company had not yet come, and Helen at once retired to bathe her stear-stained face, while Gerald impatiently waited the arrival of Mildred to hear from her own lips an explanation of her strange conduct.

The party came at last, but neither Mildred nor Robinson was with it. Great was the surprise of all when they found the two missing, it being confidently thought that by taking a shorter road, as Gerald had done, they might have arrived in advance. As it was, they might come yet, and the supper was delayed, and an anxious watch maintained; but, when an hour elapsed, Gerald would wait no longer. He could not content himself in the gay company while his heart was so torn by suspicion and outrage, and, on the pretext of fearing some accident had happened, he ordered his horse, which still bore marks of its recent hard ride, and dashed homeward.

The house was in the same state of illumination as when he left it, the lights in the study streaming through the open windows out upon the piazza, and a tall figure seemed to be pacing the path. Waiting only to stable his panting horse, Gerald hurried back to the pacing figure. It was Robinson.

“Methusala! Gerald, what’s brought you back?”

“To see what happened to you. And where is Miss Burchill?”

“In her room, asleep by this time, I reckon. When she found you had gone off with Mrs. Phillips, she took the matter quite sensible like; jist as well pleased, I reckon, because she said she didn’t care about taking the drive, and I didn’t care much either. So we went into the study and had a chat. Reckon we were nigh as comfortable as you folks, eh?”

Gerald flushed and paled. Here was almost a direct confirmation of Mrs. Phillips’ statement. Mildred did not care for the drive,—the factory owner had been careful not to insert the saving clause “with myself,”—consequently, regardless of every honorable propriety, she had simply availed herself of the most convenient means of fulfilling her engagement. Then, also, the words and tone of Robinson indicated a sort of familiarity with him, on the part of Miss Burchill, which sickened Gerald. Was he again deceived in a character that he thought so good, and for which he had already conceived a warm admiration?

Unwilling to hazard by another question information which might give him further pain, he turned away, resolving to defer his judgment on Miss Burchill’s conduct until she should give or send him an explanation of it.

Robinson called to him:

“Where’s the rest of ’em, and what did you do with the little widow?”

Gerald answered somewhat hotly:

“As she forced herself upon me, I escaped from her company as quickly as possible by leaving her with the rest of the party at the hotel.”

And, lest he should be questioned farther, he hurried away.

Some time in the small hours of the morning the company returned. Robinson awaited them, and gay voices and loud laughter made the parlors resound for another hour; but Mrs. Phillips broke from the party almost immediately, and hurried to Miss Burchill's chamber. The latter was a light sleeper; she heard the first gentle tap at her door, and half expecting it to be Cora, she waited only to light the gas and throw on a morning dress before she opened it.

“Let me in,” said Mrs. Phillips, quickly; and when Mildred stepped aside she followed her, and seizing her hands drew her to a large easy-chair before the bed.

“Sit there, Milly, and let me explain to you how it all happened. Oh, I am so unhappy!” and to Miss Burchill's astonishment a wild burst of tears succeeded the last speech. “Mr. Thurston mistook me for you,—you know in this cape I resemble you,—and he snatched me into the wagon before I could say a word. When he found out the mistake, he seemed to think that Mr. Robinson would drive you, and anyway, that we should meet you at the hotel. But he will explain it all to you in the morning, I am sure, unless perhaps you have already seen him,” looking up through her tears.

“I have not,” said Mildred, quietly, though her heart was beating wildly with various emotions, among which distrust and a half disgust of the widow predominated.

The latter regained confidence, but at the same time she seemed to read Miss Burchill’s mind. With her tears still flowing, and her white taper hands resting, clasped, in the lap of Mildred, she resumed:

“You think I am gay and pretty, and all that; but you don’t see the heart I carry. You don’t know how suffering has seared it. Oh, Milly, if you knew my secret history you would pity me. Some day you will let me confide in you? I should have asked to do so long ago, but I hesitated to sadden you with wrongs such as I have known.”

Mildred did not answer; she was thinking of the last words—“wrongs such as I have known.” Could it be that Gerald had inflicted any wrong upon Helen in severing their engagement?

“You do not speak,” said Mrs. Phillips. “You, too, refuse me my one last consolation,—a true friend.”

She was perfect in the art of simulating grief; tones, gestures, expressions were all in accord, and Miss Burchill was touched in spite of herself.

“You may confide in me when you wish to do so, Mrs. Phillips,” she said; “but I think now you had better retire; this excitement is too much for you.”

“Have you forgiven me, then, for taking your place to-night? It was unintentional. I could not help it,

and I also expected to meet you at the hotel, when the mistake could be rectified, and you could return with Mr. Thurston. I could not sleep until I had explained it to you, and now, if you are angry or distressed about it, my heart will break."

"Oh, no; Mr. Thurston, as you say, will doubtless explain to-morrow."

"Well then, kiss me good-night, dearest, or rather good-morning, for I declare, is not that four striking? and there is Cora, I think," as a rustle of garments sounded in the next apartment. She ran off, leaving Mildred so sleepless and anxious that she peeped at last into her pupil's room. The girl was slowly disrobing, but catching sight of the pale face in the doorway, she sprang towards it:

"Oh, Miss Burchill, I wanted to see you so much, to know just why you didn't come; but as uncle said you had retired, I didn't like to disturb you."

"I didn't go because there was some mistake which resulted in Mrs. Phillips going with Mr. Thurston; but perhaps it is as well."

Cora looked earnestly into the frank eyes turned upon her own, and at length, as if she doubted how her communication would be received, but felt that it must be made, she said:

"Mightn't Mrs. Phillips have done all that on purpose, so that you couldn't go with Mr. Thurston?"

"Why should she do so?" was the wondering reply.

“ Well, I don’t know, but I don’t like Mrs. Phillips ; and I heard some one say in the parlor the other night that if Mrs. Phillips wasn’t Mr. Thurston’s stepmother they’d say she was in love with him she watched him so ; and then some one else said that they guessed you had the best chance, for Mr. Thurston was always paying you some attention. And I wish it were so, for I like him.”

“ Hush ! ” and Miss Burchill’s face was scarlet. But Cora gave her a hearty kiss and darted away to bed.

All the next day Mildred waited for some explanation from Gerald, but none came ; a certain sense of propriety kept her from sending one to him, and at length, though somewhat unhappy at his inexplicable silence, she consoled herself by thinking that in the evening when she met him in the parlor all would be explained. In the evening, however, he was not among the company, and Mrs. Phillips informed her that Gerald had gone to New York with Mr. Rodney. But neither Mrs. Phillips nor Mr. Robinson, from whom she received her information knew that Gerald had gone to New York to avoid the company at the house. He was again out of tune with everything of the kind, and believing Mildred, since he had received no explanation from her, to be wanting in the qualities which he most admired in woman, he was anxious not to meet her. Rodney being obliged to return to the city, Gerald determined to accompany him, ostensibly on business ; but

the business could have been transacted as well without his personal supervision. On the train Rodney said, having watched for some minutes in silence his companion's gloomy visage and abstracted manner:

"Come, Gerald, don't let last night's disappointment work upon you so much. I've studied Miss Burchill during my stay at The Castle, and what conclusion do you think I have come to?"

A look of inquiry was his only answer.

Rodney slapped Thurston's knee as he resumed:

"That she's just guileless enough herself to become the victim of that little devil of a widow. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to find that the jade's told some whopping lie to Miss Burchill about this affair."

"But Miss Burchill should have sent me some explanation," answered Gerald.

"There you go at your old rate, my boy, jumping at angry conclusions, and forgetting that, if you were bitten once, all women are not snakes."

But Gerald had leaned back with his hat over his eyes and his teeth set hard together.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN Gerald had returned to The Castle the guests had all gone, and the mansion had resumed its wonted quiet aspect. Miss Burchill again voluntarily confined herself to her own part of the house, and Mrs. Phillips paid her daily visit as persistently as ever. That visit had grown to be an intolerable infliction to Mildred, and again and again she had to fortify herself for its endurance by recalling her promise to her mother.

But the widow assumed that she was quite welcome, and she "deared" Mildred and Cora, and hung about them, and was constantly seeking to insinuate herself into their regard by little flattering speeches, or to win sympathy by doleful accounts of her unpleasant life at home owing to Miss Balk, until both teacher and pupil felt like begging her to desist. The pupil, indeed, showed her anger and disgust on more than one occasion, and nothing but her desire to please Mildred, to whom she was devotedly attached, prevented her from showing continually the aversion she felt. Cora was now fourteen, tall for her years, and scarcely as girlish in appearance as her age would warrant her to be.

Miss Burchill was seriously debating the propriety

of asking Mr. Robinson to send his niece to some educational institution. Should the factory owner assent to the proposition, she could pursue with better heart a plan that she had formed for herself. It was that of seeking a position in Boston. She had some hope of success, owing to the acquaintances she had made among Mr. Robinson's recent guests, and she was the more anxious to make the trial as The Castle had lost its charm for her. She had neither seen Gerald nor heard from him since the night of the ride, and suffering keenly from a silence which at times her imagination distorted into the acme of unkindness, she was often tormented by fear that she herself might be to blame; and yet, as the days wore on it became more and more like a gross impropriety for her either to make or demand any explanation of the unfortunate occurrence. So she bore her pain in silence, but joined to Mrs. Phillips' torturing attentions it was fast becoming intolerable; indeed, nothing but her affection for Cora kept her from taking an immediate departure. She fancied that away among different scenes she might teach herself to forget the causes of her pain and annoyance. There was also another reason for changing her residence. Mr. Robinson was beginning to show her unwished-for attention, frequently sending her choice bouquets and the rarest of his hothouse fruits, accompanied by his compliments; all of which Mrs. Phillips managed to see, and at which she laughed and shook her head significantly. Then,

also, he had more than once, on the occasion of an accidental meeting with the governess, expressed a wish for her, in company with her pupil, to join him and Gerald at table. But Mildred respectfully declined, and continued to take her meals as usual with Cora. At length the factory owner insisted that his niece should dine with him, possibly with the hope that Miss Burchill, deprived of her companion, would be compelled, as it were, to accede to his wish. But she preferred dining alone, even though Cora protested against it both by tears and entreaties. The widow of course at once knew of the arrangement, and she so manœuvred that she also was asked to dinner by Robinson. Thurston started when he entered the dining-room and saw her, but, recovering himself he bowed distantly, and requested the servant to change his place at the table to one quite removed from Mrs. Phillips. She bit her lip and blushed violently, while Robinson regarded the proceeding with ludicrous astonishment. He made no remark, however, and Helen, as if she were not in the least disturbed, addressed herself to the factory owner, assuming the while so gentle and modest an air that she might be thought to be some unsophisticated girl scarcely released from the espionage of her governess. As the meal went on,—Gerald silent and seeming to pay not the least attention to anything but his plate,—her vivacity somewhat increased. She managed to introduce Miss Burchill's name.

“When I learned,” she said, “that Miss Burchill *would* dine alone, I at once offered to bear her company, but she refused, owing I suppose, to her generous consideration for me. She disliked to subject me to the loneliness which she so courts. And when I urged her to accede to your request, Mr. Robinson,” smiling sweetly, “she said the meal would be much more enjoyable to her without society,” glancing significantly at Gerald, but he was looking at his plate.

There was an exclamation from Cora, who sat directly opposite,—an exclamation that sounded like angry astonishment at Mrs. Phillips’ statement, and that brought upon the girl the wondering looks of her uncle and Thurston.

Helen was inwardly frightened, and she was also inwardly chafing that she had been so imprudent as to forget the girl’s presence when she spoke. Anxious to avert a catastrophe, she leaned gracefully across the table, and said, with her most insinuating tone:

“Dearest Cora, you frightened me when you exclaimed so suddenly.”

Her tone and manner brought about that which she feared. Cora exasperated by a show of affection that she felt was only assumed, and indignant at the covert disparagement of Miss Burchill that the speech seemed to imply, and not having the governess near to warn or reprove her by a look, burst out with angry impetuosity:

“How could you tell such a story Mrs. Phillips?”

You know you *never* offered to dine with Miss Burchill, and when I wanted you to help me to coax her to dine down here, you said you guessed she was better off upstairs; that she might feel out of place with uncle and Mr. Thurston."

"My dear Cora, you forget that Miss Burchill and I, being such intimate friends as we are,"—there was a peculiar emphasis on the last words, used especially for Gerald,—“have many conversations which you do not hear. The one that I have repeated has probably been such,” and Helen turned to her plate with easy nonchalance.

“I don’t believe it,” answered Cora hotly, now so angry that she was quite regardless of everything but her own excited feelings. “I shall ask Miss Burchill the moment I get upstairs.”

But Robinson was now aroused to a sense of propriety, and also to some regard for the feelings of his guest. He commanded Cora to be silent; and the meal was finished without any further reference to Miss Burchill. On Gerald’s face a grim smile hovered, and more than once his eyes wandered in mirthful appreciation to Cora.

Cora hurried from the dining-room in order to see Miss Burchill, and Mrs. Phillips also hurried out on the same errand. They arrived almost together, and before Mildred could recover from her astonishment at their sudden, and on the part of her pupil, excited en-

trance, the girl had told the whole story, Mrs. Phillips standing by with the air of a martyr.

Before the governess could form an answer, the widow was saying, reproachfully:

“ You might have spared me, Cora, for, in the excitement of my conversation with your uncle, I did not quite think of what I was saying; and I knew that if I had not already spoken to Mildred in the manner that I described, I should do so very speedily.”

“ But you had not done so, Mrs. Phillips,” interposed Mildred, feeling as if her annoyance and disgust of the speaker had reached a culminating point, “ and there is no excuse for an untruth at any time.”

“ You surely are not angry, dear Milly? I meant no harm, and it was all owing to an unfortunate habit of exaggeration which I possess.”

“ It would be well then, Mrs. Phillips, to cure yourself of a habit which may be the occasion of injury to others.”

But the moment that the words had left Miss Burchill's lips she felt keen regret. She had spoken so hastily, out of the very heat of her annoyance, and she felt as if she had broken her promise to her dying mother,—that promise which had enjoined upon her so strictly to be kind and gentle to any one whom she disliked or who had done her an injury.

Mrs. Phillips was crying, but then as Cora remarked, her tears came so frequently they lost their effect.

"I am sorry if I have hurt you," Mildred forced herself to say as gently as she could, "and I shall be frank enough to tell you that your untruth caused me a good deal of pain." She was thinking of Gerald, and wondering whether Mrs. Phillips' avowed habit of slight untruthfulness had anything to do with her disappointment on the night of the ride.

"You are an angel, Miss Burchill. Oh, if I had only a mother to train me as you have been trained; but I had no one, no one, only harsh Barbara Balk." And the widow threw herself on her knees by a chair in a perfect abandon of grief.

That allusion to a mother brought out all Miss Burchill's sympathy. She forgot everything but the affecting picture before her, and she bent above Helen, as tender and forgiving as the little widow could wish her to be.

That interview, however, decided Miss Burchill on hastening to execute the plan she had proposed to herself. She could not continue to associate with a person of such character as she now felt Mrs. Phillips to be, nor could she longer insist upon her pupil's entertaining much regard for the lady. So an hour later, when Mrs. Phillips had taken her departure, and Cora was about to descend to her uncle, Miss Burchill requested her to ask Mr. Robinson to grant her an interview that evening. The request was such an unusual one that the

girl stared, and she asked at last as if impelled by some unpleasant presentiment:

“Is it something in reference to me?”

“I would rather not tell you until I have spoken to Mr. Robinson.”

Forced to be satisfied, but by no means assured, Cora descended slowly, encountering Gerald as she was about to enter her uncle's study.

“All over your indignation?” he said playfully.

Glad of an opportunity to give entire vent to feelings that she had been compelled to restrain somewhat in Miss Burchill's presence, she answered:

“No, I am not; and it's just enough to vex any one, the way Mrs. Phillips gets round Miss Burchill. She has been up there a whole hour begging Miss Burchill's pardon for the story she told at dinnertime, and saying it was all owing to her habit of exaggeration. Ugh!” And an expression of disgust and a shrug of the shoulders evinced to Gerald that feelings more intense were at work than were shown even in her words.

“Oh, it *was* a story, then?” he said, still using his playful tone, though there was a grave earnestness in his eyes.

“Of course it was,” she answered, with angry astonishment. “Do you think I would have spoken as I did at dinner if I did not know that she was telling a story? She just exasperates me with the way she fawns around us, and though I know Miss Burchill dislikes her as

much as I do, she tries to be gentle and agreeable, and tries to make me so too, because she says it is our duty to be kind to everybody, no matter how hard it is for us to like them."

There was no stopping Cora now. She had found a listener who neither checked nor reproved her; indeed, one who seemed to listen eagerly; and the girl as eagerly detailed every annoyance Miss Burchill and herself had suffered from the widow, and her account included even Mrs. Phillips' conduct on the night of the ride, saying:

"I just think she tried to make Miss Burchill late, so that she could go with you herself, the way she wanted this done and that done, and Miss Burchill stopped all her own preparations to wait upon her; and then of course, when she came down and found you had gone with Mrs. Phillips, she couldn't and she wouldn't go with uncle. Ugh! how I hate Mrs. Phillips. I wish she'd never come near the house."

But Gerald scarcely heard the last exclamation. A flood of light had been let in suddenly on thoughts which had annoyed and perplexed him for weeks.

"Is Miss Burchill in her room now?" he asked.

"Yes; she wants me to ask uncle to give her an interview with him this evening, and I have a feeling that it's about me. I mean that she wants to give up teaching me, and perhaps go away somewhere. I know she is dreadfully unhappy, but she wouldn't tell me anything about it because I'd be unhappy too."

The great clock in the hall above was striking the hour. Cora started, and with a hastily spoken, "Oh, how angry uncle will be for keeping him so long!" darted away. Gerald turned away, also, but it was to send a servant to Miss Burchill with the request that she would meet him in the parlor as soon as convenient.

Miss Burchill blushed when she received the message until her cheeks rivaled the roses of the hothouse bouquet which Robinson had sent to her that evening; but by the time she arrived at the parlor door the blush had gone, and she was pale and trembling. Thurston, awaiting her, met her almost on the threshold, and he was struck at the thin and worn appearance of her face. Mental suffering was visible in every line.

"I have sought this interview, Miss Burchill," he said leading her to a seat, "in order that something which I think has been a mutual misunderstanding may be explained. I mean the unfortunate occurrence of the evening of the ride. I waited to hear from you about it, and I was not a little surprised and disappointed at your silence. Now, however, I am convinced that you had equal reason to expect to hear from me and to be surprised, and perhaps indignant, at *my* silence. I regret it all exceedingly, I assure you, and I beg you to forgive me. Will you do so?"

He extended his hand, and looking, as he did to Mildred, positively noble, with a smile mantling his bright, manly face, her heart went out to him. She put

her hand into his, while a great glad thrill went through her whole being.

“Now tell me,” he said, “how I came to have”—there was a slight hesitation, owing to his determination never to pronounce, if he could help it, his stepmother’s name—“another, instead of you accompany me that evening?”

“I do not know,” she answered, “further than what Mrs. Phillips told me: that, mistaking her for me, you caught her so quickly into the wagon there was no chance for her to rectify immediately the error. When you discovered it you seemed to think that I would accompany Mr. Robinson, and that you would meet us at the place to which we were all going.”

Thurston’s face looked for a moment as if it were frozen into the hard, almost cruel, expression in which it became set as she spoke, and he dropped her hand, that he had continued to hold, as if his own hand had become powerless.

How did she come to be on the back porch instead of you, when her place was with the company in the front of the house?” he asked.

“She went to apologize to you for my delay.”

“Did you send her to do that, or did she ask to be permitted to perform that kind office for you?” with a touch of sarcasm in his tones as he said the last words.

“She asked,” was the reply.

“ Well, Miss Burchill, her statement so far as taking her into the wagon under the impression that it was you, was correct; the rest of it I regret to say, was untrue. I did not discover the mistake until we were some distance from the house. It was impossible for me to turn back on account of the viciousness of the horse, and I was led to believe that you had gone with Mr. Robinson. I was impatient to meet you to hear the explanation which I deemed to be my right, and when I was disappointed I looked confidently to hearing from you the next day. Now I know that, with my usual impetuosity, I judged you wrongly, Miss Burchill. Again forgive me, and assure me that we are friends, perfect friends, and that you will let me help you whenever I can. Will you do so? ”

She bowed an assent. Her heart was too full to allow her to speak. It was such a change from the doubt and misunderstanding and unhappiness of the past weeks to the certainty and bliss of this moment.

“ You *must* let me help you,” he repeated; “ and, in order to do that, you must tell me why you are not so happy in The Castle as you used to be. Tell me frankly what your grievances are.”

There was that in his manner of respectful yet tender protection which often goes to a woman’s heart more potently than a handsome face or endearing language.

“ I have no grievances,” she answered, “ and the annoyances which I have felt are too slight to mention.

But I have thought of seeking a position in Boston. My pupil has now reached an age which demands a more enlarged course of instruction than I, perhaps, am competent to give, and I thought of placing the matter before Mr. Robinson, and urging him to send her to some woman's college.

"Have you any reasonable hope of obtaining a position in Boston?"

"None, beyond an application to some of the people who were here last summer. I have many of their cards, and I have been invited cordially to visit them whenever I should go to Boston."

"I cannot say that I quite approve of your plan, Miss Burchill. Calling upon people to ask their aid in securing a position is a different thing from visiting them socially, and I am afraid your sensitiveness would suffer severely. I would suggest that you remain another year with your present charge. You are competent, I think, to teach even the mature age of fifteen, and during that time I shall exert myself to obtain for you a suitable position. Do you consent?"

Even if she had felt utterly disinclined to agree to the proposal, the earnest persuasiveness of his voice and manner must have overcome her disinclination. As it was, she murmured a brief reply, but it quite gratified him, for he smiled and said:

"I feel as if you were conferring some obligation on me by consenting to stay, and now with your permission,

I shall tell Mr. Robinson that the necessity for which you sought an interview with him has been obviated."

He led her to the door, and with a kind good-night, held it open for her, while she passed out, feeling strangely contented and happy.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THURSTON took his way to Robinson's study. Cora was still there reading aloud from the daily paper, and her uncle released her from the task on seeing Gerald. The latter announced that he had come for an interview.

"Methusala!" exclaimed the factory owner. "What's the matter? Here's Cora been telling me Miss Burchill wants to see me, and now you want an interview. Well, run out, Cora, and you, Gerald, take a seat."

Gerald did so, beginning immediately:

"Did you insist on Mrs. Phillips' visits to Miss Burchill? I understand that she has your permission to come every day and read with her, but I have reason to believe that her visits are now and have been for some time quite an infliction."

"Been talking to Miss Burchill, eh?" and Robinson's face evinced the keenest interest.

"Yes; I have just left her, but she did not *tell* me this about Mrs. Phillips. I discovered that fact, and I discovered also that these visits are one means of making Miss Burchill desire to leave The Castle."

“To leave The Castle,” Robinson repeated, his voice slightly trembling, and a crimson spot beginning to show on each cheek.

“Yes; it was in reference to that she wanted an interview with you, but she has promised to remain another year.”

The factory owner seemed relieved.

“And you think this little widow’s visits ain’t agreeable to Miss Burchill?” he said.

“I *know* they are not,” was the decisive reply.

“But what can I do, Gerald? It won’t do to tell Mrs. Phillips she can’t come to The Castle,—that’s agin my principles of hospitality; and besides, the little widow’s too pooty and too nice to be kept out in that fashion.”

“You needn’t ask her to keep away from The Castle,” was the somewhat quick and sarcastically spoken reply. “Only allow *me* to request her to keep away from Miss Burchill’s part of the house.”

“Reckon you hate her pooty strongly, Gerald?” and the factory owner laughed. “Well, can’t blame you much, as she’s got your rights; but she’s a pooty woman, and you be mighty hard to touch when you ain’t moved by them eyes of her’n. Do as you like, Gerald, for I don’t want Miss Burchill to go away on no account, and I don’t want Mrs. Phillips kept away altogether from The Castle, neither.”

“Don’t fear,” said Gerald with a grim smile. “I

shall not deprive you of Mrs. Phillips' company." And he turned to depart, but the factory owner called,—

"Don't go, Gerald, till you git Cora back."

It was singular, and, were it not for a certain something which seemed to forbid the merriment, laughable, his fear of being left alone in his study during a certain time of the evening. It was a well-known fact, that he *was* afraid, and the very servants gossiped and wondered about it till, on more than one occasion, some of them began to have strange imaginations of their own, and to put into circulation mysterious stories about the numerous lights in his study and bedchamber that did little credit to the factory owner's heart or head. Even Gerald looked as if he felt some contempt for Robinson's childish weakness, but he pulled the bell and waited until the servant who answered the summons reappeared with Cora. Then he repaired to his room and penned the following to Mrs. Phillips:

"MADAM:—In your future visits to The Castle you are requested to refrain from going to the part of the house assigned to Miss Burchill and her pupil.

"GERALD THURSTON."

The next morning a servant was dispatched with the note to Mrs. Phillips. When she received it, recognizing the penmanship, she became violently agitated. Not trusting herself to read it immediately, lest Miss Balk might appear, she put it into her pocket and took

her way to her room. Barbara had heard the knocker and looking from a window, recognized in the bearer of the note one of Robinson's servants,—the man had been sent occasionally from The Castle with messages during the summer. She descended immediately, meeting Helen at the foot of the stair.

"Has Mr. Robinson sent to inquire about my health?" she asked sarcastically, in order to let Helen know that she was aware from whom the messenger came, and at the same time she stood in such a way that it was quite impossible for any one to pass her in order to ascend.

"No; the message this time is from Mr. Thurston to me," answered Helen stung into replying that which an instant before she did not dream of telling.

But the only effect the announcement had on Barbara was to make her shrug her shoulders and laugh her horrid laugh, from which Mrs. Phillips retreated precipitately into the open parlor, where she waited until her tormentor disappeared.

The widow had at last an opportunity of reading Thurston's note. From the fact that the bearer had not required an answer, she augured ill of its contents, and, with a presentiment that made her weak and trembling she tore it open. Her eyes became fixed as she read, and she continued to hold the note before her, even when she had read the contents three times. Then she threw herself into a chair, and burst into a passion of tears.

That the note had grown out of her own unlucky remarks at dinner the previous evening she felt assured, but her mind was further tormented by thoughts of the possible conversation which Gerald might—nay, which he must—have had with Miss Burchill, in order to produce such a peremptory message. She was puzzled to decide what part, if any, Mr. Robinson had taken in it, and at length, when her paroxysm had spent itself, and her thoughts grew maddening she started from her seat, and began a careful arrangement of her toilet. She would seek an immediate explanation from Mr. Robinson, even if that explanation should result in deeper chagrin than she already felt.

Barbara was careful to be in sight when Mrs. Phillips, resplendent in one of her newest and latest costumes came from her room.

“Ah!” she said, pursing up her lips and eyebrows, “spreading your net again for Gerald Thurston; and does he consent at last to fall into it? Poor little angler! What a desperate tug you will have to pull him in!”

But her last words might have remained unspoken, for Helen had rushed down the stair and out, slamming the door violently behind her.

Robinson was descending to lunch when Mrs. Phillips was announced, and instead of continuing to the dining-room, he turned into the parlor, where she waited with her most bewitching smile, while at the same time she feigned to be extremely agitated.

“What does this mean, Mr. Robinson?” drawing forth Thurston’s note, and placing it open in the factory owner’s hand. “What have I done to Miss Burchill, that she should seek Mr. Thurston to champion her cause? And was it in accordance with *your* wish that this was written?”

She put her dainty hand in most confiding fashion on Robinson’s arm as she spoke. He thrilled at the touch, while at the same time he tremblingly put on his spectacles, and read the note, saying, when he had finished:

“You mustn’t blame me, Mrs. Phillips. I ain’t no party to this thing further’n being told by Gerald that he knew your visits wan’t agreeable to Miss Burchill; and then I jist let him take his own way of arranging matters, only that I told him he mustn’t interfere with your comin’ to The Castle to see me.”

“Thank you, Mr. Robinson,” and the little neatly gloved hand, still resting upon his arm, slightly pressed it in token of ardent gratitude.

Robinson resumed:

“You see, Mrs. Phillips, there’s no accounting for a woman’s whims when she gits ideas into her head, and I look on this thing as one of Miss Burchill’s whims. But I didn’t want to force her to anything agin her liking, because she might go away from The Castle, and that would throw Cora on my hands.”

“And is there not another reason, *dear* Mr. Robinson,

why you do not wish Miss Burchill to leave The Castle?" and both dainty hands were placed confidently on his arm, while, with a most significantly arch look and smile, Mrs. Phillips gazed into his eyes.

He reddened slightly in spite of himself, and stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Will you not trust me?" pursued the insinuating voice. "And have not I myself, observed sufficient to discover your feelings with regard to Miss Burchill? Believe me, Mr. Robinson, when I assure you that nothing would make me happier than, if it were in my power, to further your suit. As it is, I think Miss Burchill may have been a little jealous of your attentions to me and hence may have arisen her complaint to Mr. Thurston, which resulted in such a rude message from him."

"Jealous, eh!" repeated the factory owner, childish enough in his petty conceit to swallow the bait with which she so cunningly tempted him.

"I am sure, dear Mr. Robinson, of my assertion; I make it from my own observations of Miss Burchill's character."

"It ain't unlikely," he answered, with such an evident belief in his own power of fascination that Helen with difficulty repressed a laugh.

She rose to depart.

"Now that I *know*, dear Mr. Robinson, *you* do not exclude me from The Castle," with a most marked

emphasis on the word "you"—"I am quite satisfied. With regard to Miss Burchill's and Mr. Thurston's feelings towards me, I can only deplore that circumstances have made me the object of their animosity." Her handkerchief was to her eyes.

"Oh, don't now, Mrs. Phillips; Miss Burchill and Gerald 'll come around all right by and by, especially when Miss Burchill gits to be Mrs. Robinson," and the factory owner smiled, and winked his little greenish eyes very hard. "But come in now to lunch," he continued; "won't be no one there but me. Gerald's so busy at the factory he can't git here for more'n an hour yet," and Helen gracefully accepted the invitation.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. HOGAN called twice at the home of Mrs. Phillips in search of that lady. The first time she was met by the servant, who informed her that Mrs. Phillips was out; the second time by Miss Balk, who gave the same information, but who, in the same breath demanded her informant's business. The woman did not reply for a moment, and she twirled her hands in her shawl in a way that bespoke embarrassment.

"Oh," said Barbara sharply, and with a look that made her listener shiver, "if it's any secret about Mrs. Phillips you had better say so."

"Dear, no!" Mrs. Hogan, somewhat alarmed by the fierce demeanor of Barbara hastened to answer. "It's no secret about Mrs. Phillips at all. She doesn't know what I want her for. It's just a little private business of my own, and being as she was so good to us there awhile back,—coming to see us, and not alone helping me, but giving a lift from her purse to other poor creatures,—I thought I'd make bold to ask a favor from her, and——"

"There, there; that will do?" interrupted Miss Balk, putting her hands to her ears in affected horror.

"Mrs. Phillips has gone to Mr. Robinson's, and I don't know when she will be back," and the door was closed almost in Mrs. Hogan's face.

The action was so abrupt that the woman stood for a moment, still twirling her hands in her shawl, and looking if she did not realize that she had been so rudely shut out. When she did, she said to herself:

"Faith, them that call Miss Balk queer have good right to say it. She hasn't the manners of a kitchen-maid. I wonder if her mind is touched?" And as she turned away, and out to the road, she continued to soliloquize: "It won't do for me to call *there* again. It might raise queer suspicions in her mind if she saw me, and I can't tell why, but I'd rather, somehow, she'd not know what I want to see Mrs. Phillips for. What shall I do? He'll be so disappointed, poor man, when I go back again and tell him I didn't see her. Well, there's no help for it. I'll have to put a bold face on myself, and come again to-morrow morning early."

Having thus decided, she began to walk at a more rapid gait, but when she arrived at a turn in the road which would take her directly to the other side of the village, she saw a richly dressed lady advancing to her, in whom, to her delight, she recognized Mrs. Phillips.

"Oh, ma'am!" she burst out eagerly, forgetting in her delight that it was not an equal she addressed; "I've been to your house twice looking for you. There is a man stopping with us who wants a note taken to

Miss Burchill. He says he knew friends of hers long ago, and that he doesn't like to call on her as he is in poor circumstances, and can't dress presentable, but he is in a hurry to see her at our place. I'd have taken the note to her myself, but there's a squeezing about my heart that won't let me put foot on Mr. Robinson's grounds, and I thought of you. You told me the last time you came to see us that you used to visit Miss Burchill every day. Maybe you wouldn't mind giving the note to her."

Helen's eyes glistened. A note to be intrusted to her for Miss Burchill from one of the sterner sex was a rare opportunity, and she extended her hand eagerly, while she said:

"I shall be most happy to do any favor for Miss Burchill. Let me have the note."

"Oh, ma'am, if you wouldn't mind coming to see the man? When I spoke of you he said he would like to see you first."

Helen turned immediately to accompany the woman, and the latter's expression of gratitude had hardly ceased when they arrived at her own threshold.

He in whom Mrs. Hogan had been so interested rose on their entrance. He had been sitting with his face buried in his hands, a posture which probably had given to his features their florid hue, for in a moment the color disappeared, and left him white as from illness. About forty years of age, and tall and well-formed,

there was a slight and not ungraceful stoop in his shoulders that gave him the air of one accustomed to deep thought. The stubble of an unshaved beard covered his chin, which, like the rest of his features, was large and strongly marked. He was evidently a man of great nerve and will, and were it not for a certain restlessness of the eyes, must have been capable of any command he undertook. As it was, despite his clothes, which were exceedingly shabby, there was a nameless something about him that proclaimed him far above what he seemed, and even dainty Helen was impressed in a way most unaccountable to herself.

Mrs. Hogan introduced him as Mr. Wiley, and he said at once, in a deep, clear voice:

“I shall be much obliged to you Mrs. Phillips, if you can get a note from me to Miss Burchill to-day.”

“Certainly,” she answered sweetly. “I have just returned from Mr. Robinson’s but it will be no trouble to call there again to-day. I would do anything that has reference to dear Mildred.”

“You know Miss Burchill so intimately, then?” the stranger said.

“Intimately,” was the enthusiastic reply. “Mildred Burchill is my very dearest friend.”

A smile overspread his features for an instant, as if in cynical doubt of the friendship so warmly attested; but it disappeared, and he was asking gravely, as he extended to her a sealed packet:

“Are you quite sure that you can place that note in Miss Burchill’s hand to-day?”

“Quite; and to convince you, I shall depart immediately, without even waiting to speak to Mrs. Hogan’s little ones,” both of whom, from a little distance, were bashfully looking at the beautiful lady.

And Helen took her leave, but she did not repair to The Castle. She hurried instead to her own home, and having found that some rare good fortune had sent Miss Balk out, she dispatched the servant abroad on an errand and went to the kitchen. Drawing forth the sealed packet, she held it above the steam of the boiling kettle until the seals dropped apart and the open letter lay in her hand. Then she hastened to her room, locked herself in, and read in bold, manly, but evidently hurried characters:

“I know not how to address you, for I am not aware that you know much, or in fact anything, about me, and yet it seems impossible to doubt that you have at least heard of Chester Horton, your mother’s only brother. Perhaps she has told you of her wild affection for me when I, in a reckless and impetuous youth, would burst from restraints that were only for my good. In my headstrong folly I ran away from her at last from England, where she lived then, and I came here to America. That was before you were born. Meeting with rebuffs more severe than I had anticipated I came at last to sow steadier oats. I obtained a good position with a banking

firm in Boston, and I rose in the world. Strange chance made me acquainted with the sister of Caleb Robinson, the wealthy proprietor of the factory here. He was a loutish Yankee boy at that time, and while I loved his pretty sister, who was utterly unlike her brother, I could not bear him. He saw my dislike and resented it. We quarreled, and finally we got to keeping out of each other's way.

“ I continued to get on in the world, being advanced to the position of confidential clerk of the firm, and my home (for my wife loved me) was happy. I wrote to England to my sister, your mother, but it was only to receive in reply from those who knew her there that she had come to this country,—exactly where, they could not say.

“ One black day the chief banker of the firm was discovered dead, evidently murdered. The books were found to have been tampered with, figures falsified, and whole records torn out, and everything was circumstantially traced to me. I was innocent of all, but the sternest facts told against me, and I was about to be held for trial, when one of the partners in the firm who had been my warm friend from the time that I was advanced to my last position, and who now expressed his belief in my innocence and sympathized with me, contrived to get me secretly away. He intended that I should flee to Europe, but I determined to linger a day in order to enlist Caleb Robinson's sympathies for my

wife and child, whom I must now abandon for a time. It was a dangerous expedient, but I did not shrink, and I came here secretly to Eastbury, staying in disguise at one of the humble places in the village, while I dispatched a letter to Robinson appealing with all the force of which I was capable to his sympathies, and begging his care for my wife and little one. He sent me an answer the words of which at that time cut me to the quick.

“It was while waiting for his answer that I accidentally learned of your mother’s residence in Eastbury. I even saw her, and you with her, Mildred. You were then a child of seven or eight years, and my first impulse was to flee to you both, but sterner thoughts restrained me. I had given sufficient pain to your mother’s heart in the past without now inflicting an additional one, as I must do if I disclosed the cause of my presence in Eastbury. Also, she might not believe me innocent of the crimes with which I was charged, and that would cut me to the soul. So I fled, but the very next day I was apprehended and brought back to Boston for my trial.

“The sentence came speedily enough, and but for the efforts made in my behalf by the partner of whom I have spoken it would have been my execution; as it was, it was imprisonment for life. I bore it as well as I could. I tore myself from my wife and babe, and faced with what resignation I could summon, the grim

life before me. My wife wrote to me and sent me frequent pictures of herself and my child, but we never met. I did not desire it, for I felt the meeting in such a place would have been too much for her. She died at last; they gave me word of that and that Caleb Robinson had taken my little girl. Oh, the fierce longing to behold my child that ate up my soul then! I felt as if I must burst the prison walls and be free; but I had to be patient, and I carefully bided my time. My good conduct for so many years won for me many privileges, and at last there came a chance of escape. I seized it, and with a will to drive every obstacle from my path I secretly made my way, and Providence favoring me, I arrived here yesterday. My cautious inquiries elicited sufficient to guide me to the Hogans' where I presented myself as one Robert Wiley, who had known your relatives in England, and was now anxious to see you. They are simple, good people, and all that they have told me about you, reassures and consoles me. It seems like a singular and tender dispensation of Providence that you should have the care of my darling. Did you know that she was so nearly related to you? Have you learned to love each other? And how, Mildred, will you meet me? Will you believe in my innocence? Will you meet me as your mother's once idolized brother? It was a relief to write all this rather than wait to tell it to you, and besides I wanted you to know my history before you should meet me. Now having written it, I am in doubt

how to get it to you. I have a fear of trusting it to the mail, for by this time there must be a hue and cry after me, and Mrs. Hogan has some strange repugnance to setting foot on Robinson's premises, but she has promised to find me a trusty messenger. When this reaches you, will you come as soon as possible to Mrs. Hogan's? I feel every moment as if some detective were ready to grasp me, but I shall brave it all in order to see my daughter. When you come, perhaps you can devise some means of bringing her to me, if only for a few minutes. It is unnecessary to warn you to burn this letter, and to guard its contents sacredly within your own breast.

“Impatiently until I see you,

“Your uncle in distress,

“ROBERT WILEY.”

Mrs. Phillips' cheeks were glowing and her eyes sparkling when she finished reading, and yet she felt a keen sense of disappointment. She had hoped that this letter from a masculine stranger to Miss Burchill might have revealed something unfavorable to the character or reputation of the governess, and in that case what an opportunity would she not have, what ways and means would she not employ, to let Gerald know that Miss Burchill was not such a pattern of virtue! But the letter, as it was, was of a kind, could Gerald read its contents, to enlist his interest in and sympathy for the

governess. She bit her lip in her vexation and disappointment, and her brow gathered into a scowl that took away much of its beauty. At length her face brightened, and hurriedly getting writing materials, she copied every word of the letter. That done, she sealed the original, and with both documents safely in her pocket, again hurried out. Miss Balk had not yet returned, and Helen walked with utmost speed, lest she should meet her, for inexplicably to herself, she had a sickening dread of encountering the spinster just then. Perhaps she felt that the ominous-looking, penetrating eyes, that seemed to have the knack of observing what was not intended for them, would discover, somehow, the base act of which she had just been guilty. But Barbara did not appear, and Mrs. Phillips was again at The Castle, three hours after she had left it. Robinson, however, was out, and the servant could not tell the time of his return. She would wait, and she seated herself at one of the windows that commanded a view of the path by which any pedestrian must come who sought entrance to the house, debating with herself whether to send immediately Mr. Wiley's letter to Miss Burchill, or to wait until she had her interview with Robinson. While she was thus undecided she saw Thurston coming up the path. In a moment her resolution was formed. She bounded out to the hall and confronted him just as he opened the door.

Drawing the sealed packet from her pocket she

extended it, saying at the same time, with an air of gentle and melancholy reproach:

“Obedience to the harsh request which you sent me this morning reduces me to my present strait. I was intrusted with this letter for Miss Burchill. The *gentleman* who gave it to me was most anxious to have it reach her from my hand, but I have been rudely excluded from her apartments. In my perplexity as to how I should gratify his desire, I have been waiting here to see Mr. Robinson. However, as you are Miss Burchill’s friend and champion, I shall give it to you.”

Gerald took the letter, saying quietly, though her words had aroused unpleasant surprise and doubt in his own mind:

“There need have been no difficulty about so simple a matter as conveying a letter to Miss Burchill. A servant is always at hand. However, as you say, I *am Miss Burchill’s friend*,” with an emphasis on the last phrase that cut his listener to the soul, “and I shall deliver it to her.”

He bowed gravely and left her. Had he once turned back to see the expression which distorted her features he might well have wondered how he ever had been won by the charm of her beauty. Rage and hate changed the color of her face and swelled the veins in her forehead, causing her temples to throb with such agony that she pressed them against the cold glass of the window-panes for relief. That which added to her unhappy

emotions was the thought that Mildred, in her dismay and perhaps grief at the contents of the letter would reveal those contents to Gerald, and thus secure in him a firmer friend than he might be even at present. She writhed at the thought, even though she experienced no little satisfaction at the remembrance of having told him that it was a *gentleman* who had given the letter.

Robinson was coming in. She hastened to compose her face, and to meet him with the pretty, and confidential air which she knew exerted so winning an influence upon him.

"Take me to your study," she said sweetly. "I have something so secret and so important to tell you."

He led the way to that apartment, ringing as soon as he had entered it, for the candles to be lighted, though the wintry day had not yet declined, and he did not even seat himself until every wax light was ablaze.

Helen drew forth a copy of Robert Wiley's letter:

"You will wonder, my dear Mr. Robinson, at the accident which placed the original of this in my possession, and which Miss Burchill has by this time. It was given to me for her by the man who signs himself there. As I was excluded from Miss Burchill's apartments, I gave it into Mr. Thurston's charge."

Robinson adjusted his spectacles and read it: read it more than once, from the length of time which elapsed until he looked up from its perusal. Then his face was so changed that she shrank involuntarily from him.

The crimson spots which any mental disturbance brought into his cheeks were burning there fiercely, and contrasted with the yellow hue and dried, parchment-like appearance of the rest of his face, gave him a very singular look. His mouth, was drawn into an expression of such determination that his lips seemed like a thin blue line.

She summoned courage to say:

“I thought it right for you, Mr. Robinson, to know the contents of that letter as well as Miss Burchill; and I thought also”—she had conquered her fear, and she pulled her chair to his, and put her hand in its old confiding fashion upon his arm—“its contents rightly used must bring Miss Burchill to your feet.”

“Eh! What do you mean?” And the red spots on his cheeks glowed the more, and his eyes from which he had taken the spectacles, flamed at her like little balls of greenish fire.

“Has not the thought suggested itself to you?” Her voice was so tremulous from her eagerness that she could scarcely pronounce the words. “Could you not, with your wealth and influence, place this Chester Horton or Robert Wiley as he signs himself here, in security? Could you not assist him to such a disguise that in another country he could live safely with his daughter if they should both so wish it? And could you not make all this the condition of Miss Burchill’s becoming your wife? Set before her the two alternatives: Mrs.

Robinson, with her uncle placed in safety and assisted to a comfortable living, or Miss Burchill, with her uncle remanded to prison and her relationship with him given to the public. It may be that her affection for him will not be sufficiently great to make her consent to your wish, especially now, as I more than suspect that she loves Gerald Thurston, while, on the contrary, her sense of duty, or her affection for her cousin Cora, or both, may be motives sufficient to win her consent with little difficulty. In either case, since you wish Miss Burchill to accept your hand, my plan seems a feasible one, does it not?"

She was glowing as if the flame of a heated furnace fanned her face. The factory owner had not once taken his eyes from hers, and now they seemed to burn into her own as he said:

"You *are* a pooty little witch, Mrs. Phillips; I wouldn't have thought of that, nohow."

Helen, exulting that her proposition seemed to be so well received, hastened to add:

"But you must be careful, Mr. Robinson,—careful lest Miss Burchill should confide in Mr. Thurston; his sympathies once enlisted, Chester Horton might be got without much difficulty beyond even *your* reach."

"Oh, yes; I shan't forget all that. But this thing about Miss Burchill liking Gerald. Are you pooty sure of that?"

"From all I have seen lately—yes; but the regard

on Mr. Thurston's part is owing to his admiration of her virtue. Once prove to him that Miss Burchill has flaws in her character as well as other people, and his esteem will scarcely remain. I fancy that I gave him one unpleasant subject of thought when I handed him that letter and told him it was from a gentleman. I think it rather startled him to find she had a man friend other than himself. So, Mr. Robinson, if you will work carefully, restraining any precipitation, and if Miss Burchill has discretion enough not to confide in Mr. Thurston, and if she has sufficient tenderness of heart to see occasionally this unfortunate relative of hers, why Mr. Thurston may get to know of her surreptitious visits, and they may cause him to wonder, and perhaps doubt a little in this lady's affection for himself."

Robinson was looking at her with a curiosity in his expression almost ludicrous, and he said as soon as she had ceased:

"So you ain't sich a friend to Miss Burchill as we thought you be. Well, if you women don't beat us men all to pieces for smilin' at each other when you'd rather be tearing each other's eyes out."

"Oh, no! Mr. Robinson. Don't judge us—don't judge *me*—so harshly. I *was* Miss Burchill's friend until she turned Gerald against me,—Gerald for whom I would have done anything."

"It appears to me that you have more'n a step-mother's liking for Gerald," said the factory owner.

Helen had gone so far in her confidence to this man whom she secretly loathed, that she felt impelled to go still farther, and with a reckless disregard of the dictates of prudence, she told him, with her handkerchief to her eyes, of her former engagement to Gerald.

“Methusala!” exclaimed the factory owner. “I reckon I understand it all now. That’s the reason Gerald acts so queer and stiff to you. But how in thunder did you come to marry his father,—for his money, eh?”

In answer to which Helen told a very pretty little story, exculpating herself entirely, and rather making herself out the victim of a plot by the Tillotsons to marry her to Phillips, of whose relationship to Thurston she was quite ignorant. Gerald had neglected her; he had not answered her letters; he had not concerned himself about her, and she, poor innocent, in despair and helpless, had become the bride of Mr. Phillips.

“I did not inform him of the fact that I had been engaged to another,” she continued, through the tears which she could make to flow at will, “because that other had so cruelly neglected me; but when we were married it seemed to me that I should have no secrets from my husband, and I told him then, hardly two hours after the ceremony. But how did he receive it? Instead of accepting it as a proof of my wifely honor, instead of cherishing me for my frankness, he threw me from him, calling me a terrible name; and when I

fell, stunned by his act and his words, he bade me begone. I fled from him, but before I reached the door Heaven had punished him, for he fell in the fit which preceded his death."

Her face was now buried in her handkerchief, and she was gently sobbing.

The factory owner's memory had been working while she recounted her tale, calling up, almost unconsciously to himself, the tragic portions of the Phillips will case, that he had read with such avidity at the time, and he exclaimed:

"You didn't tell that when you was called to give your testimony in the court. If I recollect right, you said your husband was good and kind to you to the last, didn't you? And wa'n't that the point some of the lawyers tried to make,—that if there was any disagreement between you it would have shown good grounds for a change in the will?"

Helen was a little frightened. She had not thought to have gone so far in her tale, nor to have had it produce such a thought in Robinson's mind.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said. "I was not myself at that horrible time, and then to discover that Gerald was the son of the man I had married nearly killed me." She was sobbing again.

The factory owner waited for her emotion to subside, and when she took her handkerchief from her eyes they had nothing of the homely appearance which

copious weeping gives to most eyes. Tears glistened in a very pretty way on her eyelashes and cheeks, but that was all.

Robinson looked from her to the open letter, asking:

“Was it you wrote this, and wan’t the letter sealed that you gave Miss Burchill?”

Helen laughed and averted her head, as she answered:

“You must not question the offices a friend performs for you. If I have done you a service, prove your gratitude by accepting it unquestioned; if not, do not censure me for having tried to serve you.”

“And serve yourself at the same time, eh?”

And the factory owner grinned sickeningly; then he continued:

“You want Miss Burchill out of the way of Gerald, even if you *can’t* have him. Well, it’s all right as long as I want Miss Burchill; and I reckon we’re about alike in our thoughts just now, both of us havin’ a mind to do anything that’ll make us succeed. We’ll be pooty sure not to blab on each other, and I *am* sort of obliged to you for what you’ve done, Mrs. Phillips, though it’s been kind of dirty work for a lady like you to open a sealed letter.”

“I did not tell you that I opened a sealed letter,” she said, growing slightly pale.

“It’s all the same as if you told me. How in thunder could you git this,” pointing to the letter before him, “if you didn’t have the other? and it ain’t likely Chester

Horton would have sent a letter to Miss Burchill without sealing it. But you needn't look so skeered; I ain't going to blab anything, and, as I said before, I'm obliged to you." He rose, folding the letter as he did so preparatory to putting it into his pocket.

"Let me have it," she said, extending her hand, "or destroy it now, in my presence," as he shook his head in answer to her request.

"I *must* have it," she repeated, almost trying to snatch it; but he evaded her, and answered while he shut it up in his pocketbook.

"I allers like to keep sich dockyments for a while; but as I said before, you needn't be skeered; my keeping it ain't going to do you no harm."

The clock on the mantel chimed the hour as he spoke, and he raised his eyes at the sound. In an instant the same mysterious change came over his appearance which had so disturbed Miss Burchill during her interview with him on the night of the ride. His knees visibly shook, and his very teeth seemed to chatter, while his eyes looked over Mrs. Phillips, and apparently to a distant corner of the room. She turned affrightedly to see the cause of his evident terror, but as in the case of Mildred, scarcely a shadow was observable.

"What is it, Mr. Robinson?" she exclaimed, turning to him with lips and cheeks as pale as were his own.

He raised his hand as if to motion her to silence, and

his lips moved, but no sound came from them. She, as completely terrified as he seemed to be, was uncertain whether to fly or to remain; indeed, her limbs appeared to be paralyzed, and she leaned in a helpless way against the chair beside which she stood, while she felt as if her very hair were standing on end. At length he turned his eyes from the part of the room where they had been steadfastly fixed, and sank into his chair with a great long drawn breath of relief, while the perspiration rolled from his face.

"Skeered?" he said looking up at Helen, and attempting to smile, but the attempt was almost an exact representation of the grin of a death's-head. "*You* didn't see anything," as Helen now totally overcome, sank into her chair. "Spooks don't come arter you, yet. They come arter me. They come every day, but mostly later than this."

"Let me out," moaned Helen. "I shall faint here."

"Pooh, pooh!" said the factory owner, now quite recovered. "Don't be so skeered; them spooks don't do no harm. Wonder old Phillips' spook don't come arter you."

But Helen seemed on the verge of fainting, and he hastened to lead her out to the piazza, where the sharp, frosty air revived her.

"I'll go home," she said, eager for the first time in all her life to be away from The Castle. She had a wild feeling of some mysterious presence being still

about her, and Robinson, as he stood beside her, tall, spare, and curious-looking, seemed in the semi-darkness like a ghost himself. To her greater disgust, he insisted on accompanying her home; she looked so white and weak that he feared some accident to her on the way, and he would not trust her to a servant's care lest she might unconsciously make some revelation of the recent scene in the study; so despite her protest and entreaties, he accompanied her, leaving her only when the door of her own dwelling had closed upon her. He had refused the invitation to enter, much to Helen's satisfaction, her satisfaction being increased when she saw Barbara in the hall, that lady having hurried thence when she heard the knocker—and she had been in ample time to see Helen's escort. Mrs. Phillips was still so pale that it excited Miss Balk's curious attention, and her greeting was:

“You look as white as if you had seen a ghost.”

The widow shuddered and looked at the black eyes fixed upon her own with a thought that, resolved into words, would have been:

“Is this woman a devil, that she seems to divine everything?”

But she did not answer, and she was proceeding to her room, when Barbara followed her, saying:

“Is old Robinson falling into that net you set for Gerald? Well, you won't have such a tug to pull him

in, but won't he lead *you* the life when he gets you! You'll do penance for all your sins then, Helen."

Mrs. Phillips would endure no more; she turned short upon the stair which she was ascending, and stamping her foot, screamed rather than said:

"How dare you insinuate such things of me! And you have fallen wide of the mark this time. Mr. Robinson will make Miss Burchill his wife."

"Really?" replied Barbara with a coolness which showed no astonishment at the information. "And," she continued, "will Miss Burchill make Mr. Robinson her husband, or does the desire exist alone upon his part?"

"The lady has not told me her feelings upon the subject," answered Helen sarcastically.

"No, not likely, especially as she has more chances of becoming Mrs. Thurston than you have. Don't be in such a hurry to get away from me," as Helen was beating a precipitate retreat to her room. "I have another word to say. Mrs Hogan was here looking for you. Guess you've discontinued all that goody-good business, haven't you? She spoke as if you hadn't been there in some time. You gave it up when you found it wasn't likely to win Gerald, and it's troublesome, this playing the hypocrite." But Helen had locked herself in her room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THURSTON was himself the bearer of the letter to Miss Burchill, summoning her for that purpose to the parlor. Perhaps he wanted to observe her manner when she took it, for having glanced at the superscription, and having seen that it was written in a fine manly hand, he was conscious of a slight pang lest Miss Burchill's affections were already engaged. But her surprise was so great and so genuine as she received it that he felt quite relieved. He had told her from whose hand he had taken it, and in her astonishment at being the recipient of a letter—she had no correspondents—she forgot to wonder why Mrs. Phillips had not been herself the bearer of it. Having made a few kind inquiries, Gerald left her to its perusal. She took it to her room.

“O my God!” she said when she had read it, and her tears were falling fast, “how inscrutable are Thy ways! It was, indeed, a tender dispensation of Thine that made me the teacher and companion of *his* child. Oh, mother, I shall now have an opportunity of fulfilling your bequest. He must be in sore need. My poor, poor uncle!”

“She rose and hastily dressed herself for a walk; then taking from a trunk her little savings from the

salary she had been paid by Robinson, and avoiding Cora, who was dressing for the evening dinner, she hurried out and took her way to the Hogans' home.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Hogan had any curiosity to know more about the stranger who had solicited from them an abiding place than what he had told them, and it sufficed that he was a friend of Miss Burchill. Owing to their warm regard for her, her name was a passport to any kindness they could render; so Wiley, as he called himself, was treated to the best the poor people could afford, and neither plied with questions nor asked to talk upon any subject further than that upon which he might choose to speak himself. As soon as Miss Burchill appeared, Mrs. Hogan, with instinctive delicacy, before suffering her to meet the stranger, ushered her into an adjoining room, and bade Mr. Wiley follow. So the two were quite alone when they met. Both stood irresolute for a moment, each actuated by emotions which at once impelled them to and restrained them from each other.

At length he extended his hands, and said with a tremor in his voice that awoke her keenest sympathy:

“Are you glad or sorry to see me, Mildred?”

All that her mother had told her of her own wild affection for this same man when he was a youth seemed to come before her, and in his face, which bore in its features a striking resemblance to Cora, there seemed to be all the candor and affection which must win such

regard. She sprang to him and flung her arms about his neck, while her tears fell passionately upon his bosom. He strained her to him, his own eyes moist, and his lip quivering. When their emotions had subsided, he led her to a seat, and said, as he seated himself:

“Your face has the same expression that it had when I saw you last, a child.”

“And you,” she replied, “have much of the look which your picture has,—the picture my mother gave me before her death.”

“Tell me about her,” he said eagerly,—“all about her. She was mother, father, sister, everything to me in my youth.”

And Mildred told him, though her voice was often choked by tears that came at the revival of tender recollections. Then he asked her to tell about his daughter, the child whom he had not seen since she was a babe of a few months. She told everything she knew of Cora, described her looks and her disposition, and then she detailed her own interview with Robinson, from which she first learned of her relationship to the factory owner's niece. Wiley's face grew a little dark as he listened, but he said when she had concluded:

“I cannot conquer my dislike to this Robinson; but I owe him no small amount of gratitude at least for doing for my child. And I am very grateful to him for not telling her that her father was a convict. She shall never learn that from *my* lips. And now”—he lowered

his voice still more, though the whole conversation had been almost in whispered tones—"I had a glimpse of to-day's paper. Hogan brought it home with him at noon, and the hue and cry after me is in full heat. By some strange luck there was another prisoner of my name, Horton. It was by his help I escaped. His term was also a long one, and his friends, who were many and powerful, made desperate secret efforts for his escape. Being allowed many privileges, as I told you in my letter, it was not difficult for me to hold communication with him. The similarity of our names drew me to him; we became attached, and the assistance to escape given to him was also extended to me. We got away, helped from one house to another, and he urged me to remain with him; but he was going to sea, and I wanted to behold my child. We parted, and I see by to-day's paper that they have tracked him to the time of his having shipped on a whaling voyage, and they think that I have done the same. Not a clue has brought them in this direction, so that I am safe,—at least for the present. Last night I sounded Hogan out there, and he seems to be a simple, good fellow, though with strong passions and prejudices. I hinted at settling down here to some kind of work, and he spoke of the shop where he is employed.

"All that I want, now that Cora is as well done for as you say she is, is to see her occasionally, without letting her know that I am her father. Being a babe

when I left her, she does not remember me, and to reveal myself to her, being what I am, would inflict upon her only needless pain,—pain which might cause her, in spite of herself, to betray my whereabouts to her uncle. No; I will never do it,” straightening himself with that air of determination which gave so marked a character to his features; “and when I have seen her, should the law again seize me I shall be satisfied. My life is a blighted thing now, and were it not for Cora, I should have made no effort to escape. I am innocent of the crime for which I have been imprisoned, but having been condemned and made to suffer so unjustly, I have since had it in my heart more than once to do worse than that I have been accused of. But” making an effort to recover from his despondency, and speaking with an air of cheerfulness, “what do you think about my working with Hogan? I think I can,” as he saw her glance at his hands, which were small and evidently not much used to hard labor. “I have done many a rough thing in the prison, and I could board here with the Hogans, and occasionally, through your contrivance, see Cora. Introduced to her as an old friend of your mother’s, I could sometimes have an opportunity of speaking to her, if only when meeting her out in the road. But how are the people about here? Much given to gossip? I don’t want Robinson to have a sight of me.”

“You could keep out of his way without much difficulty,” she replied. “But seeing Cora will not be quite

so easy. I have never brought her here, and to do so now might excite strange suspicions."

He reflected for a moment:

"Do you ever walk with her afar from the house? Mention some spot. I shall not ask to speak to her, only to see her as she passes with you." He broke down and sobbed like a child.

"Don't," said Mildred, flinging her arms about him, and scarcely able to speak through her own tears. "And why not let her know you? Her affection, secret though it must be, will be such a comfort to you; and you need not fear for her prudence with regard to any betrayal of you to her uncle. I can vouch for that."

He shook his head:

"No, no! I shall not blight the very springtime of her life by letting her know that her father is an escaped state-prison convict. If she must know it when she becomes older be it so, for by that time I may be beyond the reach of further earthly injustice. Then, also, I have a hope, which never wholly deserts me that the justice of God will some time prove my innocence to the world,—prove it before He summons me to His tribunal; and because of that hope, I would conceal myself at least a little longer from Cora. But tell me where I can wait for you and her to pass to-morrow."

On the morrow Cora would take her music lesson from Clarmont. But Mildred feared that Mrs. Phillips

as usual, would be in the way, either to accompany them from The Castle or to join them in coming from the professor's. Not being aware of Thurston's good offices in her behalf, she did not dream that Mrs. Phillips would alone not inflict her society upon her as usual in The Castle, but that the little lady intended also to discontinue her visits to Clarmont. It was true that on rare occasions Cora and she did take walks into the country beyond the village; she could propose such a walk the next morning, and she told him the time and the route they would take. His eyes glistened with pleasure.

"And *you* need not know me either," he said. "I fear if you attempted any recognition of me, I might be tempted into something that would betray me to her. And now you, of course, will be careful to say nothing of me to any one. Are you sure that you will not unconsciously betray having seen me? Do you swear that you will keep my presence here in Eastbury a secret from every one?" He spoke with an assumption of playfulness, and yet there was an evident desire that she would bind herself as he requested.

"I swear," she said, "to say nothing about you to anybody." And then, both anxious to end the interview lest its extreme length might cause the Hogans to wonder, he kissed her and led the way into the other room.

The traces of tears were yet on Miss Burchill's face, observing which, Mrs. Hogan said:

“It’s no wonder you’d cry, poor dear, with the joy of meeting some one that knew your poor mother’s people; and sure if Mr. Wiley’d like, Dick can get him work in the shop, an’ he can board with us, an’ then you can see him often.” For which kind offer both Mildred and Mr. Wiley expressed their gratitude.

The next morning on the conclusion of the lessons, Cora was delighted at Miss Burchill’s proposal for a walk, and she donned her hat in the gayest good-humor.

“It’s so delightful,” she said as she danced into Mildred’s room, where the latter was putting on her own hat, “to be free from Mrs. Phillips; she hasn’t been near us for a whole day. I must tell Mr. Thurston that at dinner to-night, for I told him day before yesterday what a torment she was to us.” Mildred suspended the adjusting of her hat. “Oh now, don’t look as if I did something dreadful,” Cora hastened to say, quailing a little before the look of reproach. “I couldn’t help it, and I guess Mr. Thurston was ever so glad to know all about her, for I don’t think he likes her a bit. But I know he likes you, Miss Burchill.” And, before the latter could resist, Cora had well-nigh smothered her with an embrace and had run off laughing; it prevented her from seeing how Mildred had blushed at the mention of Gerald’s name.

The morning was clear and bracing, and the walk, when they reached the outskirts of the village, though through a scene somewhat desolate because of the absence

of all foliage, was still not without its charm. Cora was in the merriest humor, and her own sparkling vivacity, together with the crisp air, had tinged her cheeks with a brilliant hue, and imparted to her eyes a gleam that made her beautiful. Mildred was far from being in the same spirits; a nameless anxiety haunted her; it caused her to start sometimes at the shadows that crossed their path, and to throw on all sides of her restless, though covert, glances. They had walked a mile or more from The Castle, and were now on a part of the road where there were few houses, and those of the rudest farm sort. They were the only pedestrians, and beyond a country wagon which occasionally passed them, and an infrequent sight of children about the entrances to the few houses, they saw nothing to betoken active life. Suddenly both beheld a form approaching them from the distance, and Miss Burchill's heart began to palpitate wildly. It was that of a man walking rapidly and quickening his pace when he saw them. As he came nearer Miss Burchill flushed and paled, and drew her breath hard, but her pupil, having no reason to attach any interest to the stranger, scarcely gave him a second look. She was occupied in observing the fantastic shapes assumed by the bare interlaced limbs of some of the trees that grew by the roadside, and she paused to look at them just as Wiley reached them; but even then Cora did not look in his direction. Mildred, in obedience to his request of the previous day, did not offer

to recognize him, but she could scarcely refrain from an exclamation when she saw the expression of his face as his eyes rested upon his daughter, who, still intently looking at the trees, seemed to be unconscious of his presence.

There was a longing amounting to agony in his look, and his features worked for an instant as if he, too, were repressing some exclamation. Finding that the girl did not yet turn her face to him he paused as if a will stronger than his own stayed his steps. The fact of his standing almost beside her compelled Cora to turn to him, and she started and recoiled before the look of those eyes fixed with wild wistfulness upon her own. He recovered himself then, and went hastily on. But not so with Cora: she looked after him and clutched Miss Burchill's arm.

"Who is that man?" she asked; "and why did he look at me so?" And then seeing that Mildred was almost as agitated as herself, she continued, "Did he frighten you?"

"No, no!" was the quick reply, and Miss Burchill, to draw attention from herself, looked after the stranger. Her pupil looked also. He was walking on slowly, his head bent, and his clothes betraying their exceeding shabbiness in the morning sunlight. The girl's sympathies were aroused and her generous heart touched by his apparent poverty and the dejection of his mien. Tears filled her eyes, and she hurriedly searched for her pocketbook.

“He is in need,” she said. “I must give him something.” And before her companion could restrain her, she had darted after him.

Miss Burchill was dismayed; she knew not what effect such an action on the part of Cora might produce, whether it would harrow him into an impetuous avowal of his relationship, or add another silent pang to the bitterness of his soul. But the girl had reached him, and was tendering her pocketbook. Evidently it was refused, for she drew it back, but immediately after she selected something from its contents and proffered it. It was accepted, and she turned away and hastily retraced her steps. She seemed very grave, and began before she had quite rejoined Miss Burchill:

“He would not accept my purse, but he said he would take a small coin as a remembrance of my kindness. And if you could see his eyes when he said that! They looked as if they would pierce me through. Do you think he is a stranger here?”

“I think he is,” answered Miss Burchill, who had quite recovered from her agitation.

“Poor man!” pursued the girl, and during the walk, which Miss Burchill purposely prolonged, she gave utterance at intervals to exclamations which told how her thoughts turned persistently to the stranger. Mildred debated in her own mind the propriety of cautioning her to silence. So strangely impressed as Cora seemed to be, she would be more than likely to speak of the recent

incident at the dinner-table; and Robinson, knowing from the daily press of his brother-in-law's escape, might be shrewd enough to have strange suspicions. And yet her very caution, did she give it, must seem odd to her companion, and awaken in the latter's mind surmises that the stranger was not entirely unknown to Miss Burchill. But as Cora continued to wonder about him Miss Burchill deemed it incumbent upon her to give the caution:

"I think, dear, it would be better for you to say nothing to your uncle of having met this poor man."

Cora's great eyes opened wider:

"Why? Uncle might know something about him."

"I think it would be better not to say anything to your uncle," was the reply; "he might think it a little dangerous to expose ourselves as we do on these long, unprotected walks, and so prohibit us from taking them."

"I never thought of that," said Cora slowly; "and I guess you're right. I won't say anything to uncle. But oh, how I wish I knew the man's name and where he lives! I can't forget his look."

"Perhaps if you are patient we may find it all out in time. I can make inquiries when I go to see Mrs. Hogan."

That assurance seemed to satisfy the girl, and Mildred considerably relieved, proposed that they should turn homeward.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISS BURCHILL had scarcely finished her quiet lunch when a message was brought to her from Mr. Robinson, to the effect that he wished to see her in his study. Such a summons was so rare that it caused her to wonder and become exceedingly anxious. Could it have anything to do with her uncle? she asked herself, as pale and trembling she descended the stair. It being little more than midday, the wax candles were not yet lighted in the study, and the cheerful wintry sun was streaming into the apartment. Robinson was seated in front of the ample grate fire and beside a small table, on which lay open a New York daily paper, but bearing the date of a couple of days before.

"Jist draw a chair up here, Miss Burchill," he said, as if he were too much absorbed in the paper to pay her any save the most cursory attention. She obeyed, and when she was seated he turned the paper to her, pointing to a column which was headed:

"No clue as yet to the whereabouts of the escaped convict Chester Horton."

"Did you know that he'd escaped?" he asked, drawing the paper from her.

She had become so pale that even her lips were bloodless; but when she answered a faint "Yes," the color surged back madly into her face and neck.

"Well," said Robinson, rising, and kicking his chair from him, "there ain't no use in mincing matters any longer. I'll jist tell you at once what I wanted you for."

He stood directly before her, his hands behind his back, where they worked nervously together, and his yellow cheeks beginning to glow in spots, as they always did in excitement.

"Chester Horton's escaped, and he's here in East-bury. He's down at Hogan's; but I've got him so well shadowed by this time that there ain't no possible way of his gitting away again. Now, what I've got to say is this: as I told you before, I hain't no special cause to like the man, and it would be jist the sweetest bit of revenge I've had in a good while to turn him over to the law. But I won't do it; and I'll go further than that. I'll git him safely off anywhere he wants to go; I'll let Cora go with him if she wants to, and I'll give 'em both plenty of means to last 'em all their life, if you 'll marry me, Miss Burchill."

She sprang from her chair, but it was only to sink into it again overpowered by a horror which had left her voiceless, and she lifted her hands in mute protestation and entreaty, while her agonized face must have touched any heart save the pitiless one of him who stood unmoved

before her. Her thoughts were one wild chaos; she did not even think to question how he came by his information. She could think of nothing save the dreadful misery and degradation—as such a marriage must entail—which were proposed to her.

“And I won’t ask you to marry me,” the hard, rapid voice resumed, “until I’ve fulfilled all my part of the contract, until you’ve seen that your uncle has got away safe and sound. I won’t ask anything more than that you let me tell people we’re engaged.”

“I cannot do it,” the white lips moaned at last. “Oh, Mr. Robinson, have some pity in your heart, and do not ask me to marry you. I do not love you.”

“But I love you, and I reckon it amounts to the same thing. Besides you ’ll have a rich husband, and that’s about all most girls want these days.”

“I cannot marry you,” Mildred repeated, and she attempted once more to stand, but the room seemed to swim about her, and she sank again into her chair.

“You’d better not be too hasty about your answer, Miss Burchill; for in case you decide not to marry me, I shall send at once to the proper authorities about Chester, and, as I told you before, I’ve got him so well spied that it ain’t possible for him to git away. And I want your answer before you leave this room. As I said before I won’t be in no hurry about the marriage. I’ll give you two or three months for fixings and the things girls like to bother about, but I must have my

answer. I'll give you a few moments to think on it." He walked to the other end of the spacious room.

"To think on it," as he had expressed it. On or of what could she think save the imprisonment and sorrow from which it was in her power to save her uncle? Of her own promise to her dead mother to hesitate at no sacrifice which would befriend Horton, did she ever meet him? Of the happiness and new life which her assent to Robinson's wish must bring to the poor convict? But, on the other hand, what a picture of herself was presented! The wife of a man whom she loathed! It was too harrowing; and she covered her face with her hands and exclaimed, in the bitterness of her soul, "My God! My God!"

The factory owner stood before her again:

"Got your answer ready, Miss Burchill?"

She looked up, and his greenish eyes flaming down at her and his yellow tusks, just visible through his parted lips, inspired her with new disgust. But the sacrifice must be made if she would redeem her promise to the dead, if she would save the living.

"I consent," she said, with a gasp.

The red spots on his cheeks became redder, while his little eyes seemed fairly to blaze, and his whole manner became violently agitated.

"Then you will be my wife," he said, his very voice shaking, "and I may call you Mildred from this time? Eh?"

He bent to her, trying to put his arm about her. The undesired familiarity lent her new and sudden strength. She sprang from him as if he were some mad beast.

“Do not dare to touch me!” she cried. “My consent to your cruel proposal has been wrung from me. Fulfil your part of the contract, and leave me undisturbed to fulfil my part in sacrifice and anguish.”

She had gone from the room leaving him surprised, somewhat discomfited, and more eager than ever to make her his wife that he might compel her to wifely love and obedience. She hastened to her room to pour out her grief in fruitless tears, and Cora, who, wondering at Miss Burchill’s absence, sought frequently to enter, was as often gently denied admission.

Should she flee to tell her uncle of her trial? She felt that he would instantly give himself up in order to prevent her sacrifice. Should she tell Cora, impetuous, generous-hearted Cora? She feared some outbreak there which might culminate fatally for her uncle’s prospects. Her thoughts turned to Thurston. But, even if she were not bound by her promise of concealment to Horton, what good could Thurston effect in this case? He might—indeed, probably he would—counsel her not to sacrifice herself; but how could he help her? He had neither the wealth nor the influence of Robinson, nor was he powerful enough to foil Robinson’s efforts for the recapture of the convict. Thus thinking, she wept and prayed by turns, interrupted only by the fre-

quent gentle knock and piteous voice of Cora begging to be admitted, never having been so long or so strangely excluded from Miss Burchill's room before. She had become fretfully anxious, but all her efforts were met with the same gentle denial and request to be left alone for a little while. The governess could not see Cora in her present distracted state. At last a sealed letter was pushed under the door, and Cora's voice sounded at the same time in accents at once tearful and petulant:

“Here is a letter from Mr. Thurston.”

Mildred dragged herself from the bed, beside which she had been kneeling, and picked up the letter. She had taken no note of time in her anguish, and so painfully absorbed did she continue to be that she was rather surprised to find it had become evening. She made a light and broke open the letter, wondering curiously what could be the purport of its contents, but having no premonition of the renewed anguish which those contents were to cause her. The letter was a manly offering of Gerald's heart and hand:

“I thought not to have made this proposal so soon, Miss Burchill,” the missive continued. “Indeed, I had almost decided to wait some months yet in order to be very certain of your affection for me. As it is, I am not sure of all of your regard beyond what you would give to any friend, but I am certain of my own love for you, and that is so strong that it would not let me wait

longer. I love you, Mildred,—allow me to call you so this once,—for the virtues which I have observed in your character; above all, for that sweet, gentle charity with which woman is angelic, without which she is a blot upon the creation, and I long to have your gentle ministry about myself. I have suffered keenly in my life, so keenly that I cannot even now revert to those memories of the past without feeling again much of the bitterness of my first pangs. I loved once, Mildred, but my love was shattered in cruel duplicity and treachery. I thought never to love again, but you have won me from my resolution; you have realized to me all my boyish dreams of woman's true and tender character. Forgive, then, my precipitancy, and let me know my fate at once. Where my heart is engaged, my impetuosity knows little control. Cora will bring me your reply.

“Yours in ardent expectation,

“GERALD THURSTON.”

Had she read aright, or was it not all a horrid dream? Was so bitter a cup as this reserved for her? and must she drink it?

“O God, pity me!” she said, sinking upon her knees, and pressing again and again her parched lips to the letter. Thurston had long since won her deepest affection through the virtues which she had observed in him, but with true womanliness she had sought to conceal the

fact even from herself. Now, however, with his own manly proposal before her, the tide of resistless passion for a beloved object swept over her soul in a storm that would be neither calmed nor abated. It seemed as if her heart must break, and the burning tears which blistered the letter seemed to be wrung from her very soul.

“I cannot make this sacrifice,” she said to herself. “At least I shall tell him all, and then he will know that I love him, and that I give him up only to save another.” But in answer to that soliloquy rose up sternly her promise to Horton to tell nothing about him to any one. And even did she obtain a release from that promise, what help could Thurston render in this case? It would be impossible for him to foil now Robinson’s designs in regard to the convict,—designs which, she felt, any withdrawal on her part from her contract with Robinson would but render more desperate and malicious. And did she refuse to sacrifice herself, how could she be happy, even as the esteemed and beloved wife of Thurston, when every day of her future would be harrowed by pictures of her uncle again in prison, separated from his child, treated with far greater severity than before, and dying at last, perhaps, unattended and unconsolated? One of the family already had died in prison,—died for her; must this one also when she could prevent it? No, no; despite her anguish, her heart rose up with its denial, and after all was it not better to sacrifice the happiness of one when that sacrifice would bring

joy to two? Then her own life might not be a very long one. Its very wretchedness must shorten it, and God would recompense her. He who had sacrificed Himself for her would give her strength. Out of the last thought came an unexpected calm, and she was enabled to think more clearly than she had yet done. She was powerless to give any explanation to Thurston of her refusal of his offer, and did she tell him that she returned his love while she was forced to accept the hand of another, such a statement would only plunge him into dire unhappiness, and make some explanation from her absolutely necessary. There was no way for her but to make her sacrifice, horrible as it was, prompt and complete. And what if she were misunderstood, even contemned for her conduct by him whom she loved dearer than her own life? God would know what she had done and suffered, and perhaps, sometime, in His own mysterious way, He would vindicate her character. With compressed lips that told of a determination which wears upon the very heart, she drew toward her writing materials and penned:

“Accept my sincere thanks for your kind and flattering proposal. You have been and are my most esteemed friend, but I have promised to marry Mr. Robinson.

“Yours very gratefully,

“MILDRED BURCHILL.”

The characters were so tremulous that they were

scarcely legible, and she wrote them three times before she decided to send them. Then trying to keep her wild thoughts at bay, she sought Cora. The girl was dressing for dinner, but at sight of that pale, tear-stained face in the doorway, she left her toilet to rush into Miss Burchill's arms.

"You have been sick," she said, "and you would not let me in to nurse you. And you are sick still, you look so frightfully pale. And you have been crying." All this as Cora continued to strain the governess affectionately to her.

"It is over now," was the reply, "and I shall be quite well to-morrow; and you won't say anything about my sick appearance to anybody, will you?"

"May not I just tell Mr. Thurston? He always seems so interested in everything that concerns you."

"Not even him; but you may give him this answer to his letter, please."

Cora took the note, insisting that as Miss Burchill had shut herself from sight so long, she must now remain with her until it was time for her to descend; and as Mildred could not reasonably refuse, she did so, averting her face, however, as often as she found the girl anxiously watching her.

Cora gave Gerald the note, and left him to its perusal while she went into dinner. He followed, just as Robinson, tired of waiting, was about to send for him. His face since his father's death wore always a grave ex-

pression, but now there was a painfully compressed look about the mouth and a preoccupied expression of the eyes that instantly attracted Robinson's attention.

"Anything the matter, Gerald?" he asked. "You look blue, and I want you in your best spirits to-night; I want your congratulations on my engagement with Miss Burchill."

There was a sound nearly approaching a scream from Cora, as she let fall the spoonful of soup which she had been carrying to her mouth, and stared across at her uncle as if she thought he had gone suddenly mad.

There was a firmer compression still of Gerald's lips, but that was all the sign he gave.

Cora had found her voice, and with her usual lack of regard in excitement, she said, impetuously.

"Miss Burchill going to marry *you*, uncle! I can't believe it, for I don't think she likes you well enough to marry you."

Robinson's cheeks began to glow.

"It ain't likely," he said, with a frowning glance at his niece, "that Miss Burchill made you the keeper of her feelings; she's promised to marry me, and that's all there's about it."

The girl felt that any further remark of hers would not be tolerated, so she was silent, but her appetite for dinner had quite gone. She could not help thinking of Miss Burchill's strange seclusion all day, her sorrow-stricken and ill appearance when at last she showed her-

self, and she felt that all was connected in some way with that which her uncle announced. She longed to rush to Mildred to ask her about the matter, but she feared her uncle's displeasure if she left the table now at the beginning of the meal, and as a relief to her own tormenting thoughts, she watched Thurston's face, wondering how the news affected him. She had intelligence enough to construe the expression about his mouth and the look in his eyes into signs of dissatisfaction, if not of positive pain, at the news; but to Robinson's repeated wish for congratulations on his engagement, he answered calmly enough:

“Contracts to marry are not always felicitous enough to warrant congratulations. Better defer the congratulations until after marriage,” a reply that brought upon the speaker one of Robinson's sharpest looks. But Gerald was bending to his plate, and the factory owner evidently thought it best not to refer again to the subject.

The dinner was over at last, and Cora, without waiting as she usually did until her uncle and Gerald adjourned to another room for cigars, hurried immediately from the table. Both men noticed her precipitate departure, for both continued to look in her direction even after she had vanished, but neither made any outward comment upon it. Possibly both divined the cause of her hasty exit, but it had too close and too important a connection with that which was uppermost in their

own thoughts to bear outward touching upon. She fled to Miss Burchill's room; the latter was not locked against her, as it had been during the day, and Miss Burchill herself was sitting calmly enough by a window, apparently looking at the clear starlit night. Cora rushed to her, hardly waiting to reach her before she burst out, panting and breathless:

"Are you going to marry uncle?"

"Did he tell you so?" was the quivering reply.

"Yes, he announced it at the table."

"So soon?" Miss Burchill muttered bitterly to herself, while she averted her face, but she answered:

"It is true. I have promised to marry him."

Cora was silent. Amazement, sorrow, and a momentary distrust of Miss Burchill herself were struggling in her mind, the latter feeling somewhat increased by the persistent effort of the governess to keep her face averted. But she must speak at length; she *must* know if Miss Burchill's own intended act was consistent with the theories of truth and right doing which she so constantly advanced, and she asked in tremulous tones and with a feeling of suffocation which caused the averted head to turn quickly and the pale face to become suffused:

"Do you *love* my uncle enough to marry him?"

The governess seemed to divine much of what was passing in the somewhat prematurely matured young mind beside her, and she knew what influences must go

out from her answer; so forcing herself to look steadily into the bright, deep eyes fixed with an earnest and wondering sadness upon her own, she replied, with what calmness she could assume:

“I must refuse to answer your question, nor can I say more to you than that I have promised to marry your uncle from a sense of duty.”

“From a sense of duty!” Vague words to the puzzled listener. What duty, according to Miss Burchill’s own comments on the subject when it had occasionally come up in their lighter reading, could or should make a woman give her hand where her heart could not accompany it? And though the governess had always spoken in most respectful terms of Mr. Robinson, and when in his presence had treated him with extreme courtesy, still it required but little discrimination on Cora’s part to feel that, with all, the factory owner never really possessed Miss Burchill’s liking or esteem. She burned to tell this now, and to ask what duty could justify the proposed step, but she felt that her question would not be answered.

Miss Burchill seemed very tired, indeed, ill, if one might judge by her pale face and heavy eyes; and as Cora watched her she became filled with sudden remorse for her momentary distrust. The duty said to be in the case was plainly a very painful one, judging from all the circumstances,—the seclusion of the governess during the day, her appearance when she came from her

room, and her look and manner now,—and the girl could bear her sad and perplexed thoughts no longer. She threw herself on Mildred's neck, saying between bursts of tears:

“Oh, Miss Burchill! I cannot understand it, and I cannot help feeling sorry for you. I thought you liked Mr. Thurston, and I know he liked you, and I am so disappointed.”

The aching heart of Mildred echoed it all, but her brave soul would not flinch from the cross she had decided to accept.

“You are acting childishly,” she said, with an assumption of sternness which she was far from feeling, “and if you continue to do so I shall be very much displeased. You forget that when one does one's duty happiness is sure to follow some time.”

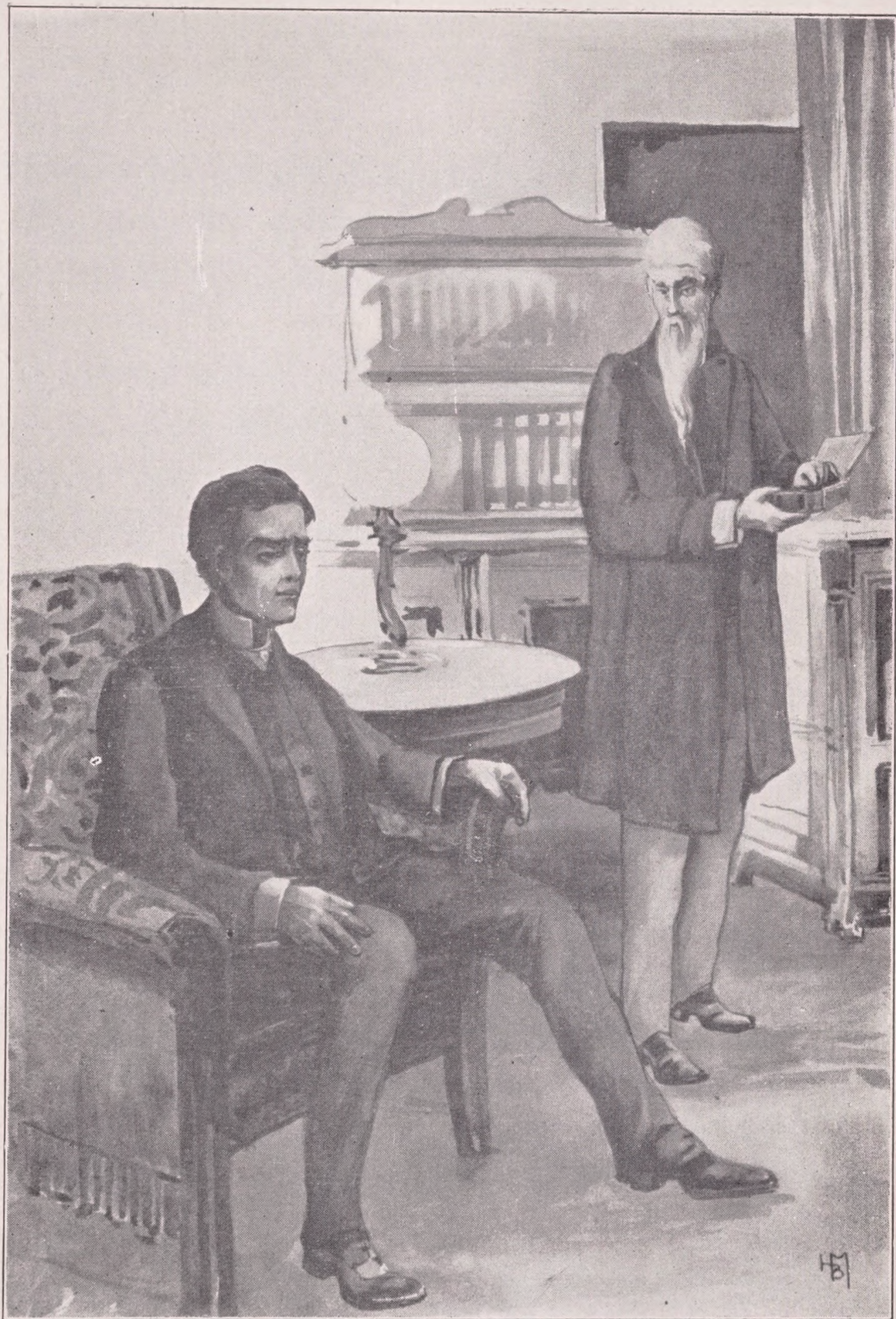
Her words had the desired effect; the girl dried her tears, and then, as the sound of a clock striking the hour reached her, she started:

“It is time for my visit to uncle.”

She rose hastily, but instead of leaving the room she stood in a troubled, uncertain way, as if she wished to say something further, but was deterred by some impulse.

“Why do you not go?” asked Miss Burchill, anxious to be alone. At which Cora stooped again, and kissing her, hurried away.

The two men had adjourned for their cigars; but



“ Not sworn ag’in smoking, be you? ”

while Robinson selected one and lit it, Gerald, without touching any, seemed to wait for an opportunity to speak.

“Not sworn agin smoking, be you?” said Robinson, noticing the young man’s abstinence, and puffing away himself with every evidence of complete self-satisfaction.

“No; but I want to talk on business matters for a few moments. You intend I believe, to retire from the factory very soon?”

Robinson, in a good deal of wonder, took the cigar from his mouth.

“Pooty soon,” he answered; “but there’ll be time enough to talk about that after my marriage.”

“No, there won’t, Mr. Robinson, for I am going away. I intend to resign from the factory altogether.”

“Eh! what?” and the factory owner’s eyes twinkled at Gerald like little greenish crystals set in yellow parchment. “What do you mean? I thought you was going to take the business. I calculated on your doing so.”

“Well, I’ve changed my mind. I have made sufficient money to lay off for a year or two and travel. After that I can find some field for my business abilities, and as you are going to retire, my leaving cannot make much difference. So I should like all accounts settled to-morrow. I want to go away to-morrow night.”

A sudden light seemed to break on Robinson's mind. He went over to Gerald, and grasped the latter's arm:

"Not cut up about my intended marriage, be you? Maybe you was sweet on Miss Burchill yourself, and feel pooty bad at losin' her?"

Gerald had swung himself free from the grasp upon his arm, and drew himself erect with that dignity which was so natural to him, and that never failed to awe any one upon whom he exerted it, while he answered:

"Your language, Mr. Robinson, is very unseemly; I can neither answer it nor listen to it."

"Well, there ain't no use in being so tichy," said the factory owner, testily. "And you'd better not be so hasty, neither,—the factory's doing a pooty nice business,—such a business as I reckon you won't git the chance of agin."

"My decision is made," said Gerald firmly, "and I shall expect to settle all accounts to-morrow. Good-night!"

He went from the room leaving Robinson astonished, vexed, and disappointed. He soliloquized, as he relit his cigar;

"With all his high speeches about my unseemly language, the fact is he's jist cut up about Miss Burchill having me. Well, I'm glad on't. I've got her in a tight place, and I guess I can reckon on her pooty sure. That handsome, devilish little widow will be cut up

when she hears Gerald's gone for good. After all, he might have stayed; I wanted him at the wedding. Well, as long as I've got Mildred, I don't care. She'll have to take her turn with the spooks, as I do."

He laughed aloud as he said the last words, a laugh that even to himself sounded so strange he shuddered slightly, then he looked at the clock in some trepidation lest the hour already had arrived in which he was subjected to the terror that not alone produced so visible an effect upon himself, but which struck fear to the heart of any one else who might be present.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MILDRED, though feeling strangely fatigued, vainly courted sleep that night. She had not retired early, expecting that Cora, according to her wont, would come immediately to her, on leaving her uncle; but the girl had gone to her own room, at which Miss Burchill was surprised, and yet relieved.

Now, as an hour after midnight, she tossed on her pillow, seeking some more comfortable position for her throbbing temples, she fancied she heard the sound of sobbing from her pupil's room. In a few minutes she was convinced of it. She rose hastily, and snatching up her morning dress, put it on as she passed into Cora's chamber. She entered so lightly that the girl, face prone on the bed as if she were trying to smother the sound of her woe, did not hear her, and the governess bent over her and watched her for a second without speaking. She seemed to be convulsed with grief, for her whole form shook in such a manner that it made the bed tremble.

"What is the matter?" asked Mildred softly.

The girl started up, and flinging her arms about Miss

Burchill's neck, strained the latter to her long and passionately.

"It's about you," she said; "it's something I wanted to tell you to-night before I went to uncle; it's something I felt I ought to tell you when I came from him, but I could not. That is the reason I did not go to your room when I came upstairs; but oh, if you knew how much I have suffered, lying here and thinking about it all."

"Well, tell it to me now," said Miss Burchill, quietly, though secretly she was almost as much agitated as Cora.

Still the girl hesitated, and she resumed her embrace of the governess, as if by that means she fain would put off her answer. But Mildred would not be put off, and, while she gently unwound the clinging arms, she insisted on an answer.

"My uncle sees spooks, as he calls them," the girl burst out, as if, did she not plunge at once into the subject of her communication, she would be unable to make it at all. "He sees them every evening, and he said to-night, when he came out of his fright, that he'd be mighty glad when he was married, for then you'd have to take *your* turn with them. He didn't mean to say that to me, for he tried to take it back a minute after, and he laughed and said what he always does about his nerves. He was afraid I suppose, that I'd tell you. But I kept thinking about it, Miss Burchill, and about

the strange way he gets into every evening when I'm with him, and I got thinking about you and what you said of marrying him from a sense of duty, and it seemed to be *my* duty to tell you all this; and then again it seemed to be better not to tell you, for if it were your duty to marry my uncle, why should I make your duty hard to perform by telling you this about him? I have never told you of the strange way he gets into every night, because I felt somehow that, as he was my uncle and good and kind to me, it would be mean and dishonorable on my part to tell anything about him which I alone saw, and that perhaps was a secret to everybody else. Then, too, he did not tell me the real cause of his acting so strangely every night, and I, though at first awfully frightened myself, believed what he told me about his being nervous and all that. But to-night he got into a more dreadful state than I ever saw him before, and he said something in his terror that made me know it all. I was so frightened, Miss Burchill, that I thought I should have fainted, and I expected to see the spook myself, but I didn't. I only saw uncle, though he looked bad enough to do for a spook."

"When I left him I wanted to rush right to your room to tell you all, but as I said before, something seemed to prevent me, and I came in here and just threw myself on the bed and hid my face lest I too should see something awful. I didn't even dare to put out the light. And then, as I lay here, I thought of you

married to uncle, and perhaps having to see what he saw, and I got nearly frantic. Do you understand it now, Miss Burchill? and have I done wrong?"

She lay back partially exhausted by her violent emotions. Mildred, agitated as she was by this weird account, was so deeply touched by the proof which it afforded of her pupil's generous forbearance in her own behalf, that it strengthened her decision to sacrifice herself; and as she looked down at the flushed young face, and thought of the happiness it was in her power to bestow on its owner, every abhorrence and fear of her proposed marriage seemed to fly for an instant, but it was only for an instant, for all came back, even as she answered:

"As there was no promise binding you to secrecy, you have not done wrong to tell me about your uncle, and you need not fear for me with regard to what Mr. Robinson imagines he sees. It is but imagination, produced, I have no doubt, by the state of his nervous system. That which surprises me most is your silly fear. Surely, in such an enlightened age as this is, a girl of your years must confess to secret shame at such childishness. Now I shall beg you to go to sleep and think no more of this, and I shall put out the light."

Her decided manner produced, as it always did, the desired effect on Cora. She offered not a single remonstrance, and the governess, having extinguished the light, went to her own room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RODNEY in his office, diving amid a mass of papers, with a corrugated brow and absorbed manner, was aroused from his occupation by the announcement of Thurston's name, the announcement being immediately followed by the young man's presence.

"Why Gerald, my boy, what on earth brings you on here now? Thought this was your busiest season? Anything the matter?" noticing the peculiar expression about the young man's mouth, which the lawyer had seen on other occasions, and which he knew so well how to interpret.

"I have given up my place at the factory, and I am going to travel for a year or two."

Rodney in his surprise, seemed to suspend for a moment the twinkling of his little sharp eyes.

"You don't tell me so!" he exclaimed. "Well, this is a world of surprises. I thought you held a life tenure there, and what's more, I was hoping that pretty, modest governess would have made you forget the treachery of that devilish little stepmother of yours."

"That pretty, modest governess," repeated Gerald, with some bitterness, "is the affianced of Mr. Robinson."

“What!” and Rodney sprang from his chair, and with his quill behind his ear and his mouth wide open, stood looking the picture of ludicrous amazement. But Gerald made no answer to the exclamation. He only stood with folded arms looking down at the floor.

Then other emotions than surprise roused in Rodney’s mind. He pitied, acutely pitied, this poor young man, doomed a second time to be the victim of disappointed affection, for, from the time he had seen Miss Burchill and had heard Gerald speak of her, he felt that the young fellow was fast learning to love the governess. He went up to Gerald, and putting his hand on his arm, said softly:

“Gerald, I pity you from my soul. But how did such a thing come about? Was there anything to lead you to suspect that Miss Burchill liked Mr. Robinson, that——”

“Nothing,” interrupted Gerald, impetuously,—“more, indeed, to make me think the contrary; and the first intimation which I received of her engagement was her answer to my own proposal of marriage to her. She stated that she had already promised to marry Mr. Robinson. Then at dinner that same evening he announced the engagement. But, good God! Rodney; what has she—such as she seemed to me to be—in common with a man like Robinson, or are women *all* deceivers? Can they wear masks at will, and go about with hearts like whited sepulchres? It sickened me, Rodney, and

I felt as if I could not draw another easy breath in East-bury. How I wish I had never seen the place!"

He averted his face for a moment, as if even from the lawyer he would conceal the agony which distorted his features. But Rodney would say another word in defence of Miss Burchill, whose gentle, unassuming manners had quite won him:

"You delayed your proposal too long, Gerald. How do you know what circumstances were brought to bear upon Miss Burchill's acceptance of this man's offer,—her poverty, perhaps?"

"Nonsense," said Gerald. "She had promised to consider me her friend, to apply to me in any need. No, there is no use in talking about the matter now. Miss Burchill has made her choice, and in doing so, she has given my heart a wrench such as I thought never would be given to it again, but I shall live through it." He strove to laugh, but the sound died in his throat.

"Yes, you will live through it," said Rodney, assuringly; "and one day, Gerald, you will meet the woman designed by heaven to bless and comfort you."

"Never!" said Thurston, through his set teeth; and then to end a theme on which he could not converse patiently, he began to talk of his future plans.

Rodney, however, would revert to the subject:

"Did you have any parting interview with Miss Burchill?"

"No; I saw neither her nor any one else. I parted

with Robinson in the factory. I did not even say good-by to the hands."

"Umph!" ejaculated Rodney. "Pretty sudden business they must all think it. Well, perhaps it's all for the best, though I confess to a secret wish that you had stayed. I don't know why, Gerald, but I have a queer feeling about Miss Burchill's engagement to Robinson; the more I think of her and the character she seemed to evince, the more I feel that there is coercion in some way."

"Pshaw!" said Gerald, and then he turned away as if he would leave the office were the discussion not discontinued.

"Well, what are your plans?" asked Rodney, willing at length to drop Miss Burchill.

"I have not matured them yet, further than to go abroad; to London immediately. I have decided to spend at least two years in travel."

"The best thing, Gerald, perhaps, under the circumstances, and you will come back with that manly spirit of yours quite restored. But when do you start?"

"To-morrow. I have engaged my passage, and I have only waited thus long to see you before I went."

"But you will let me hear from you;" said Rodney, with so much solicitude in his tones that Gerald laughed, though he was also touched by the evidence of the little lawyer's regard.

"Oh, yes," he answered; "You shall have at least a

line every few weeks, and in any case my bankers, Cramer & Co., will know where to find me." He turned again to depart, promising, however, to come back and spend the night with Rodney.

Immediately after Robinson had received Gerald's farewell in the factory, a ceremony which on Gerald's part comprised only the simplest words of adieu, and on Robinson's a somewhat constrained invitation to visit The Castle when he would, the factory owner repaired to his home and summoned Mildred. She obeyed immediately, anxious to have at once a communication the import of which her heart assured her would be—at least, in some measure—painful.

As she entered the wide hall leading to the study she came plump upon Mrs. Phillips entering by one of the numerous doors which led out to the broad piazza. The widow seemed as much surprised at the rencontre as the governess, and she drew back with a little real start, while the delicate flush in her cheeks deepened; but she recovered her self-possession in an instant, and, with an effrontery as daring as it was graceful, advanced to Mildred, saying:

"Have I to thank Providence or accident, Miss Burchill, for this meeting? My heart has so yearned to see you, assuring me as it did that, if I could but speak to you, you would reconsider your determination of not permitting me to visit you any more. If you could but know how I have suffered, how I deplore the defects in

my character which, I doubt not, have been the cause of such a resolution on your part."

And with head bent and eyes cast down she presented a most perfect picture of engaging humility and diffidence.

"*I* not permit you to visit me any more!" repeated Mildred, too much surprised to be much impressed by the widow's air. "I am not aware of any such determination on my part, and I do not understand you."

It was Mrs. Phillips' turn to be surprised, and she was in a secret rage as well; her jealousy knew no bounds that Thurston had taken so warm an interest in Miss Burchill as to send upon his own responsibility the note which requested the discontinuance of her visits. She was also angry with herself for having spoken in such a manner, since Mildred was not aware of the sending of the note. But feeling the instant necessity of withdrawing from the position she had assumed, and not willing for a moment to give Miss Burchill the gratification of knowing Thurston's interest in her behalf, she took shelter, as she always did on such occasions, in a subterfuge:

"Dear Miss Burchill, I was led to think you had formed such a determination from chance words dropped by Mr. Robinson; but only assure me now that I am mistaken and that you will receive me again, and I shall be so happy."

She extended her hands as she spoke, but Mildred did

not take them. Instead she involuntarily recoiled, while she answered:

“I do not know upon what grounds Mr. Robinson could assert that I had formed such a determination. But since you now ask me to receive your visits again, I must decline to do so, Mrs. Phillips. I feel that we never could be heart friends, and life is too short to spend any portion of it in company which we neither benefit nor are benefited by. You have no possible need of me, Mrs. Phillips. Had you such need, and were it in my power to help you, then gladly would I do so, or should I in the future be able to help you in any way, I shall most cheerfully do so. For the present I wish you every good, but I must decline all intimacy. Mr. Robinson, I believe, is waiting for me.”

She bowed slightly, and was hurrying through the hall before Mrs. Phillips had recovered from the first glow of anger, hate, and mortification into which the last speech had thrown her.

Robinson was somewhat impatiently waiting, and Mildred explained that her detention was owing to Mrs. Phillips, adding also Mrs. Phillips' communication to herself with regard to the factory owner. He laughed until his yellow tusks showed like fangs.

“Mrs. Phillips is a deep un,” he said. “She didn't tell you that Gerald wrote to her asking her not to keep up her visits to you; at least, I take it he wrote to her, because he told me he was going to. He'd been sort of

watchin' you two, I reckon, and he thought her visits wan't very agreeable to you."

Mildred sickened for an instant. Was the sacrifice to which she had pledged herself to be made more bitter by meeting new proofs of Gerald's regard for her?

"But I don't want to take up the time talking about her now," resumed the factory owner. "I sent for you to talk about Chester. Gerald's left the factory; gone for good."

He paused as if to note the effect of his announcement, and he fancied that pale as his listener was already, she became still paler, which fact gave a malicious motive to his next words. He would wring her heart if he could, since its preference was not for himself. With this object in view, he detailed every circumstance of Gerald's departure with such length and minuteness that Mildred felt like begging him to stop. But she braced herself with a strength of which he little dreamed, not even flinching when the greenish eyes were fixed most firmly and significantly upon her face:

"I guess The Castle has seen the last of Gerald. He couldn't tell where he was going, more than he'd made up his mind to travel, and he's withdrawn all his connections with the factory. He didn't care to say good-by to anybody, which I reckon is a little strange, being as you're here and knowed him so long. But Gerald's queer at times; I reckon he never got over all that excitement about his father's death."

He paused again as if he expected some question, but his listener remained mute.

“Well, now we’ll come to Chester. Being as Gerald’s gone, and being as I intend to give up the factory pooty soon, and as the search arter Chester ain’t in no way a-getting down here, I’ve been a-thinking of putting him in Gerald’s place in the factory. Of course he can’t fill the place right away, but I can teach him, so he won’t be long out of it. Then Chester’s got smart business ways. I knowed that of old, and I reckon Eastbury’s about the safest place for him. Everybody knows that there wan’t the kindest feelings between us, and they’d never suspect me of sheltering him. He can keep up the name he goes under now at Hogan’s, and if he’s known as a friend of yours, why no harm can come of it. He can live here at The Castle, and if he don’t want to make himself known to Cora, why nobody’ll tell on him. Now, if he’s willing to come to these terms, why I am his man, and I swear to Moses that I’ll stand by him, and that he’ll never be arrested in my house, nor in the factory either. What do you say to the plan, Miss Burchill?”

She could not reply that it found no favor with her, for there were two advantages to give it special recommendation: the one, that Cora to whom she was so warmly attached, and whose affection the consummation of her sacrifice would render more necessary to her than ever, would not be separated from her; the other,

that in the event of any future adverse fate overtaking Horton, she could be indeed a mother and protector to his daughter. Robinson seemed to augur favorably for his scheme from her hesitation to answer, and he waited as if to give her ample opportunity for deliberation. She said, at length:

“I shall not conceal from you, Mr. Robinson, that the prospect of having my uncle live with me is a very pleasant one; particularly so since it assures to me no separation from Cora, and were I certain that he would incur no further risk of re-arrest by accepting your offer than by fleeing to some retired spot abroad, I should beg him to agree to your proposal.”

“Why the case is jist this,” warmly answered the factory owner, who was bent on the plan because he thought it would involve the least delay of his marriage. “The track that the detectives are arter is all wrong. I ain’t been squandering the time since you promised to marry me; I’ve jist been posting myself on all the doings about Chester, and I tell you, Miss Burchill, that I don’t think there’s a spot in the hull world where he’d be safer than living here and seeing to things at the factory; and then I’ll always keep posted, and the minute I git wind of any suspicion being turned down here I’ll ship him off like lightning. I’ve got money and influence, and I’ll use ’em both. Are you satisfied?”

“Yes, so far as I am concerned; but I must consult him.”

"Oh certainly. I calculated that you'd do that, and I've wrote it all out in a letter that I want you to give him. He'll be mighty surprised, considering the way we used to meet and part long ago; but when he hears you're going to be my wife, maybe he won't wonder so much."

He took an unsealed letter from his pocket as he spoke, and placed it in her hand.

"I want his answer as soon as possible. Can't you go to see him now?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

She turned to depart, but he was speaking again:

"There's another thing, Miss Burchill—" He hesitated, as if doubtful how to make this further communication. She waited, not even helping his hesitation by a question. "Do you intend to tell Chester how it was that you came to give your consent to marry me?"

Scorn, which she could not repress, flashed into her face and marked her tones as she answered:

"I shall not tell him, Mr. Robinson; for I feel that if I did, rather than allow me to sacrifice myself for him, he would voluntarily and immediately give himself up to justice."

The factory owner was secretly relieved; that had been also his unpleasant conviction.

Again she turned to leave the room. He called her, and by her Christian name. It sounded so unfamiliar pronounced by his lips, that it gave her a sort of shock; she stopped suddenly and turned to him.

“Don’t look so skeered,” he said, approaching her. “I ain’t going to harm you. I only want you to be a little cheery like, just show that you’ll *try* to love me a little.”

“Love you!” she said, recoiling from him, while even the faint trace of color in her lips fled. “I thought you understood the terms of *my* contract with you. I promised you no love, and I consented to marry you only to save my uncle. I neither love you now, Mr. Robinson, nor shall I ever be able to love you. My duty as your wife, when I have become such, I shall try to perform. More I do not promise, nor have you any right to claim. Had you a heart you would not have used your knowledge of my uncle’s escape in such a way as to demand from me the sacrifice which you do. And now”—she drew herself up with an air before which Robinson involuntarily quailed—“I must insist that until the marriage takes place you will never again allude to the subject of affection between us.” She walked calmly by him, and out into the hall, closing the door gently behind her.

“Methusala!” exclaimed Robinson. “She’s as tichy as Gerald; but wait till the marriage takes place, as she says, and won’t I crush that proud spirit of her’n? Yes, she’ll take her turn with *you*,” shaking his fist at the corner of the room at which he always gazed when subjected to his nightly terror.

He was interrupted by a knock at the door, and

immediately after Mrs. Phillips thrust in her bright face:

“Won’t you come to one of the parlors, Mr. Robinson? You know I’ve not been in here since the evening you gave me such a fright, and I really am afraid to enter now.”

“Nonsense,” said Robinson going to the door, and flinging it back. “Nothing to be afeared of now; it ain’t the hour for me to have my spells. I never have them when the sun is shining.”

Thus assured, she entered and seated herself where an opening in the heavy winter curtains disclosed a view of the grounds. Robinson took a chair in front of her. Though with all her beauty she had not made the conquest of his heart which Mildred, all unknown to and undesired by herself, had done, there was to his coarse, sensuous nature an intense pleasure in watching the play of Mrs. Phillips’ exquisite features, and he fastened his eyes upon her in a way which disquieted for the moment even her brazen indifference.

“What’s the news?” he asked.

“I have come for yours,” she answered, with her little silvery laugh. “I thought to keep away from The Castle,—for some time, at least,—but my impatience to know how your suit was progressing with Miss Burchill would not let me rest.”

“Oh, as to that, it’s famous,” he replied, with a chuckle; and then he detailed his plan for Chester

Horton, keeping back, however, that Gerald had left.

She clapped her hands with delight:

“How splendid! And Mildred will really marry you, and then, dear Mr. Robinson, will you allow me to come to The Castle even if your wife does not wish me to come?”

A look from which even Helen shrank came into his face as he answered, “My wife shall do just as I want her to do, for I shall be her master,” and he chuckled again,—a little low, vicious chuckle that Helen seemed to hear even after it had ceased.

“And does Gerald know that Mildred is going to marry you? and what did he say about it?”

The factory owner did not chuckle this time, he laughed,—laughed till the very gums over his yellow tusks were visible. Anticipation of the wrench he felt his reply would give to Mrs. Phillips’ heart caused his mirth, for the agony of the widow would be a sort of balm to his own wounded vanity at the rejection of his love by Mildred:

“I guess Gerald was a good deal cut up by Miss Burchill’s engagement to me, for right away that he heard it he gave up all connection with the factory, and next day he went away for good.”

“For good!” She gasped the words, while the color died out of her face.

“Yes; couldn’t tell even where he was bound for, more than he was going to travel, and he went off in a

mighty hurry. But Methusala! Mrs. Phillips; *you* needn't be cut up about his going."

"Oh, Mr. Robinson, he was my stepson, you know, and I had hoped to be always near him." She broke down into real tears.

"Well, I reckon you'd better take somebody else to your heart. Look out for a husband, Mrs. Phillips, and let your stepson go. He'd never have cared for *you*."

The tone of the last words made her dry her eyes and summon her pride to her aid. It stung her to be told by such a creature as Robinson, of Gerald's lack of regard for her.

"I am so emotional," she said, readily assuming her pretty air of childish dependence, "and I give my affections for duty's sake."

At which praiseworthy speech the factory owner elevated his eyebrows a little and smiled cynically.

"Then you assure me," she continued, rising to depart, "that I shall be permitted to visit The Castle after your marriage?"

"Not a doubt on that," he answered. "I shall be master."

At the door to which he accompanied her, she paused to ask something which seemed to have come suddenly to her mind:

"Did Miss Burchill question how you obtained all the knowledge you have of Mr. Horton's whereabouts?"

Do you think she might have any suspicion that I had aught to do with it?"

"She has asked nothing about it," was the reply. "I reckon she thought if she asked that I wouldn't tell, and so she jist kept whatever suspicions she might have to herself. But as for thinking *you'd* have done such a thing as open a sealed letter, I could swear that Miss Burchill would as soon think you'd burn yourself. She ain't like you, Mrs. Phillips, and she don't know the things that some people can do." At which words Mrs. Phillips winced, and felt her heart swell with more malicious rage than ever against Mildred.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ROBERT WILEY with his quiet simple ways, his apparently thorough enjoyment of the company of Mrs. Hogan's little ones, and his tact and sympathy in all discussions with honest, impetuous, warm-hearted Dick, had gone quite into the hearts of the simple couple, and both were equally determined on making him, if possible, consent to remain with them.

They implicitly believed the brief account he had given of himself, and were utterly unsuspicious, even when his fears, which he could not always control, betrayed him into sudden starts and haunted expressions. To the other neighbors he had nothing to say, further than a simple salutation when he met them, and the fact that he was a friend of Miss Burchill—which fact Mrs. Hogan had thought it her duty to tell—disposed them all to regard him with kindly interest, and to be equally unsuspicious of any of his antecedents. Hogan had already spoken for him at the shop, and had secured a promise of speedy employment, which Wiley had decided to accept. He could not tear himself from the vicinity of his child, now that he had seen her, and in all her budding, girlish loveliness. His heart was torn by its yearning for her, and he felt that he would risk death itself rather than be separated from her by a

greater distance. It was while he was filled with such thoughts as these that Mildred came to him with her note from Robinson.

“Oh, Miss Burchill, we’re right glad to see you,” said Mrs. Hogan warmly. “Sure Dick last night got the promise of work in a day or two for Mr. Wiley, and Mr. Wiley seems so glad and thankful himself about it. I’ll take you right in to him,” and she led the way to the room which had been given up to the stranger.

Wiley met her with a smile that seemed to bring to his face the ingenuous expression it wore in her picture of him.

“Tell me,” he said, when she had seated herself, “what did Cora think about me the other day? She ran after me to give me money. O God! it was the hardest struggle I ever had to refrain from discovering myself to her.”

“She had a very singular feeling about the way you looked at her,” replied Mildred, “and she thought you were in need, perhaps. But read this before we talk further.”

He unfolded the unsealed letter she gave him. He read it, his face growing pale and red by turns, and his hands sometimes trembling so that the letter shook in his grasp.

“How did he discover all that he knows about me?” he asked, looking anxiously, and for a moment, suspiciously at Mildred.

Never for a moment thinking that he could suspect her of betraying him, she met his look confidently as she answered:

“I do not know. The first intimation of his knowledge which I received was from his own lips.”

Her answer, her look, convinced him that he had wronged her. He leaned his head on his hand for a moment and appeared to be in deep thought. When he raised it even his features were agitated.

“What sort of a person is the lady who delivered my note to you?”

“Lady? No lady gave it to me. I received it from Mr. Thurston.”

Wiley rose from his chair:

“I gave it to a Mrs. Phillips for you. Mrs. Hogan suggested that, as she would not enter Robinson’s place, Mrs. Phillips would take it, saying Mrs. Phillips was a frequent visitor at The Castle, and a good friend of yours.”

“She is, or used to be a frequent visitor at The Castle, but she is not a friend of mine,” and Mildred grew pale with the thoughts, which rushed to her mind.

“What is her character?” demanded Wiley. “Is she a friend of Robinson’s? Would her curiosity lead her to tamper with that letter in any way before it reached you?”

“She could not, she would not, be so base,” was the quivering reply. “I shall not believe such a thing of

her. Mr. Robinson must have gotten his information in some other way."

Wiley shook his head:

"Women are sometimes capable of baser things than perhaps enter into your category of their failings. However, even to know how he gained his knowledge would be of no avail now. The question to be considered is his offer,—a tempting one, I allow. But can I trust him?"

"I think you can," she answered; and then she looked at him, wondering why he said nothing of her engagement to Robinson. Could it be that the factory owner had left the announcement of it to her? Though the letter had been given to her unsealed, and was of a purport which she already knew, she had not read it.

Now she requested Wiley to read it to her. He did so, and, while it set forth in very clear terms all pertaining to the proposal, it did not contain a word relative to the engagement.

"I thought he would have told you," she said, timidly, and with a painful blush, "that he has asked me to marry him, and that I have consented to do so."

Astonishment kept her uncle silent, and for so long a time that Mildred began to be painfully embarrassed.

"To marry him!" he repeated at last. "Well, you will have wealth, Mildred; but whether you will have happiness is another question. However, since he is your choice, perhaps you will run no great risk."

Could he but have looked into her heart, could he but have seen how his tone and words were lacerating every fibre! But he could not look, and he knew nothing more than what she so quietly told him, and he assumed only that girls did not marry save for affection or wealth; and to the latter class possibly belonged this otherwise praiseworthy niece of his. In any event, the marriage would be for his interests, and it was now a strong inducement for him to trust Robinson. He answered:

“I suppose, then, that I ought to congratulate you and myself?”

She did not look up; her heart was too full. But he seemed to regard her drooped head as evidence alone of modest embarrassment, and he proceeded:

“Do you agree with Robinson in thinking it best for me to go immediately to The Castle?”

“I know of nothing to be gained by delay,” she answered, tremulously; then, after a moment’s silence, she asked:

“What course have you decided upon with regard to Cora? Will you come to us known to her as her father, or only as the man whom she and I met, and for whom Mr. Robinson made a place in the factory?”

“The latter,” he answered, firmly. “I would win her esteem, her affection, if possible, before I make myself known to her.”

She rose to accompany him to Mrs. Hogan in order to

tell her of Mr. Robinson's offer to Wiley, but she did not intend to speak of her own engagement, and she requested her uncle to maintain a like silence on the subject.

Mrs. Hogan was glad and sorry at the news. She had so confidently hoped to have their guest as a member of her own little family; but then, as she said in her cheerful way:

"It's the best thing for you, Mr. Wiley. We can all see that you're a real gentleman, and the place in the factory will be better suited to you than Dick's shop. But Dick'll feel bad, though, at losing your company."

"He won't lose my company altogether, Mrs. Hogan, for you will let me come to see you as often as I can, won't you?"

"Oh, then, with a thousand welcomes, Mr. Wiley; and it's proud we'll be of your visits, sir, as we always were of Miss Burchill's."

So Mildred took her leave, her uncle promising to follow her in the course of the afternoon.

Upon Miss Burchill devolved the task of telling Cora about the expected arrival at The Castle, and the girl's eyes brightened with pleasure when she learned that it was the same apparently poor man whose strange look at herself had so impressed her.

"How did you find him?" was her impatiently put question.

"Why your uncle had learned something about him,

and where he was stopping, and he sent me with a letter to him."

"I am so glad," exclaimed the girl, "for it would have been very lonesome now that Mr. Thurston's gone. Uncle told me at lunch he had gone for good. Do you know, Miss Burchill, I just think your engagement to uncle had everything to do with his going."

"Hush!" and Miss Burchill's hand was playfully stopping the mouth of the speaker, while her heart felt as if a cruel weight had been put upon it.

Mildred could not refrain from picturing to herself the meeting between the brothers-in-law, but all her imagination was not sufficient to depict the emotions by which that meeting was characterized. On one side there was the most intense form of Yankee hardness, accompanied by an exultant triumph in the changes which had made the factory owner wealthy and powerful, while it left his sister's husband poor and a refugee. On the other side there was a fearlessness, amounting even to that defiance which, at the risk of losing all that was at stake, might break into open denunciation and scorn did Robinson assume any of his old demeanor. But Robinson read his man. He saw that the spirit which had censured and repelled him in the past was as little broken by prison discipline and suffering as though it had encountered neither; and fearing that, if he yielded at all to the feelings which possessed him he might overshoot his mark, and perhaps even lose that

for which all his schemes had been laid, he softened his manner, and even strove to put a semblance of heartiness into his tones as he advanced with outstretched hand, to Wiley:

“How do you do, old fellow? I’ve agreed to let all bygones be buried; so I’m glad to see you, and hope you’ll make yourself to hum.”

Wiley took the outstretched hand, but somewhat slowly, while his bright, frank eyes met those of the speaker, as if he would look through them to the very heart of their owner:

“If you sincerely mean all that you have said in your letter to me, then I must confess that you are kinder and more generous than I thought it possible for one of your nature ever to be.”

Robinson laughed:

“You thought I was too darned a Yankee, I suppose, to have any of your English good-nature. Well, the fact of Mildred going to be my wife draws us pooty close you know, and makes me kinder soft on any of her relations.”

“Yes; I attributed to her engagement to you the spirit which prompted your offer to me.”

“Well,” answered the factory owner, secretly nettled that he was credited with no disinterestedness, “I gave Cora a home before I’d seen much of Miss Burchill.”

Wiley smiled slightly, as if he had read the thoughts of the speaker:

“What interested motive led you to give her a home

when, in her destitute infancy, you refused to provide for her, I do not care to know. Whatever your motive may have been, I am grateful to you for having given her a home, and I am grateful to you, on my own behalf, for what you now offer to do for me; but Robinson, let us understand each other." He drew himself up as if he were the master of the situation. "I come to make my home with you, not as a criminal escaped from justice, and indebted to you for shelter and safety; but as a wronged and innocent man, placed by untoward circumstances in my present position. My services in your employment shall compensate for your present generosity. I expect to receive such treatment from you as one gentleman would give another, and in no way shall I suffer an allusion bearing directly or indirectly upon anything of which you may suppose me to have been guilty."

"Oh well, I reckon there won't be anything said to rile your feelings. And now supposing we jist drop all this kind of talk? Dinner'll be ready in a few minutes, and as Mildred tells me you don't want to be known to Cora, I suppose I'm to introduce you to her as Mr. Wiley; and I suppose, too, I'd better begin to git used to calling you Robert. Eh?"

Wiley nodded:

"Well, I'll ring for some one to show you to your room."

He did so, and Wiley departed with the man who answered the bell.

CHAPTER XL.

CORA could not sufficiently praise Mr. Wiley. His refined air, of which his long prison sojourn had not deprived him, his perfect gentlemanliness, his quiet attention to herself whenever they met, and above all, the expression of suffering and melancholy which seemed to haunt his eyes, won her warmest interest and sympathy. She loved to talk about him to Mildred, and the latter deemed it well to invite the fullest confidence.

“I feel so often,” she said one day to Miss Burchill, when, as usual her conversation drifted almost unconsciously to Wiley, “as if I wanted to ask him what it is that makes him so sad at times. I should so like to comfort him in some way. I tried to get out of uncle what his sorrow might be, for I fancied Mr. Wiley might have told him in return for his kindness; but uncle said Mr. Wiley would never say a word about himself, and that he guessed he didn’t want people to know anything about him. Sometimes I think, perhaps, he’s lost a daughter who was like me, and that’s the reason he’s so attentive to me. Do you think it might be so,

Miss Burchill, or do you think that he has even been married ? ”

“ If we wait a little ; ” answered Mildred, evasively, “ we may learn all about him. When he knows us all better, perhaps he will not be so reticent. ”

Robinson was becoming impatient for the naming of his wedding-day ; but as often as he approached the subject, Mildred had requested him to defer it until she could be sure that there was no danger of rearrest to her uncle, an assurance which each succeeding day seemed to bring and to confirm, in the absence of even the slightest gossip about Wiley further than he was a friend of Miss Burchill, and because of that had been taken into the factory by Robinson, who intended him ultimately to fill Mr. Thurston's place. Rumor had added, though upon what authority it had based itself was a mystery to both Mildred and her uncle, that Wiley had come quite recently from England, and, as no one contradicted the rumor, it gained rapid credence. Even, the newspapers seemed to have dropped all interest in the recapture of the convict, for now weeks had glided by, and there was not a paragraph about him. For the refugee himself, he seemed to like his duties at the factory, and the operatives were fast growing to like him. In view of all these facts, Robinson determined to defer no longer to the wishes of his affianced. The influx of his mid-winter company was due in a fortnight, and, since he knew that Mildred would insist on a very quiet cere-

mony, he was determined that as soon as the visitors had gone—and he intended to shorten the time of their stay—he would have the marriage performed, and immediately when he had so resolved he sent for Mildred and announced to her his determination.

She had no reasonable excuse to oppose him longer, and yet to consent to so speedy a commencement of her bitter sacrifice was like signing her own execution. She looked at him as he stood before her, tall, spare, and with all the ungainliness bred from ill-proportioned limbs and vulgar habits, while his thin, elongated, wrinkled face looked down upon her with scarcely more expression than if it were a piece of yellow parchment. Her very soul sickened at the thought of marrying him, and it seemed to her that never before had she realized all the horror of that to which she had bound herself. She fell on her knees, and while the tears gushed from her eyes she implored him to release her from her promise.

“I will minister to your comfort in any way that I can do,” she said, “but do not ask me to become your wife.”

He laughed, the malicious laugh of heartlessness and triumph. It told her doom at once, and she sank closer to the floor, and sobbed in all the bitter abandonment of woe:

“You’ve got to be my wife, Miss Burchill; there ain’t no question about that. I ain’t going to release

you, and I'm going to stand to my part of the contract if you don't keep yours. You jist refuse to marry me, and I tell you I'll have Chester Horton with the handcuffs on quicker'n it takes to tell you this. So you jist better leave off them tears of your'n and tell me what you mean to do. I must know now, right away. Will you marry me on the day I've named?"

She arose and looked at him, her face pale, her mouth quivering, and the tears still upon her cheeks:

"Since you wring the consent from me in this manner, you have it; but remember, Mr. Robinson, you are taking a wife who, as such, will loathe and detest you." She turned quickly and left the room.

The factory owner chuckled as he saw the door close.

"Them feelin's of her'n'll change arter I get her;" he said to himself, "and when she takes her turn with *you*," shaking his fist at the corner of the room to which he always looked when under the influence of his strange terror, "she'll be tame enough, I reckon." He rubbed his skinny hands together, and continued to chuckle. Then he began to take slow, lengthy strides through the apartment, while his mind was rapidly forecasting the attendant circumstances of the wedding.

That night, for the first time since Thurston had taken up his residence at The Castle, Robinson resumed his old custom of visiting the village hotel. His visit, marked by the same apparently aimless saunter through bar-room and parlor which characterized it in the past,

excited much curiosity and secret comment. Feared as he was, because of his wealth, influence, and well-known hard cast of character, he was at the same time, because of the odd and mysterious stories circulated about him, an object of strange and absorbing interest. Men looked up now from their tumblers as he passed them, and forgot for a while to drink their contents, in their curiosity respecting him. Chance acquaintances—made such through business alone, for Robinson courted no East-bury friendships—were deterred from any but the briefest salutations by the impassable expression of the parchment-like face. Mine host himself fain would have been most gracious on this renewal of a once customary visit, though in the past it had brought nothing in the shape of patronage to the house, where Robinson was never known to have called for refreshments of any kind,—still it had been a sort of stamp of respectability, from the fact that the factory owner was the wealthiest and most influential man in the village. But even mine host's obsequiousness was somewhat chilled by the cold, indifferent manner with which it was received. A little later, however, when Robinson had finished his saunter, he stood at the bar, and to the utter astonishment of the host, demanded a glass of liquor. All the loungers about stared as if they were not sure but their ears had deceived them, and the factory owner looked around as if to note the expression of their faces, or possibly to learn their number. Owing to the compara-

tively early hour there were but few in the room, and after a slight hesitation, as if he were holding some mental debate, he said with startling abruptness:

“Come, boys, and have a treat. ’Tain’t often, I reckon, you git the chance of drinking with old Robinson,”—he smiled grimly,—“and maybe you wouldn’t this time, only I’m going to be married in a few weeks; I’m going to be married to Miss Burchill.”

A profound silence succeeded his announcement, and for two or three seconds it was not broken even by an attempt to accept on the part of those invited.

Robinson attempted to laugh away the constraint which he had imposed, and he repeated his invitation, trying to assume the jovial tone and manner which would have been the accompaniment of such an offer from almost any one else; but his effort was a failure, and it left him grimmer than before.

The host, now, somewhat recovered from his own surprise, came to the rescue, and his acceptance of the invitation reassured the others, and brought them forward at last with expressions of thanks, and congratulations on the approaching marriage, though the congratulations were spoken with an air rather suggestive of doubt and insincerity.

But Robinson had accomplished his aim; he had announced his engagement to Miss Burchill, and that announcement, accompanied by the statement that it had come from his own lips, would be speedily all over

Eastbury. Further, now that he intended to resign business, he wanted to popularize himself in his native village. While he had been accumulating money he had neither time nor thought to cultivate the feelings of his neighbors. Their friendship was not necessary to him, and the very fear in which they held him was perhaps an element in his own prosperity; but now that he was boundlessly rich, and also about to possess a wife whose gentleness and charity had long made her popular among those to whom she was known, there had come to him a new and strange yearning to be, at least, no longer disliked by his Eastbury neighbors. He would silence also the stories which he knew were in circulation about him,—stories the chief interest of which lay about his dead child-wife. He wondered sometimes if Mildred had heard them, and if it were due to them that she could never learn to love him. This plan of resuming his visits to the hotel, and treating those whom he found there, had presented itself to him as the first and most feasible mode of winning something of public favor, and though the *rôle* was not at all in accord with his feelings, he determined to assume it for a few weeks at least. His first effort convinced him—and the conviction was accompanied by a savage bitterness—that no wealth of his could purchase an iota of that friendship which was so spontaneously given to other men.

The news of the approaching marriage was discussed in almost every home in the village before sunset

of the next day, but in none with such doubt and astonishment, the latter feeling amounting almost to dismay, as in the home of the Hogans. Hogan himself at first refused to believe it; but when on going out that evening, he found the rumor confirmed by one who had heard Robinson's announcement the preceding evening, he could no longer doubt, and he returned to his wife as dejected and gloomy as though some calamity had befallen himself.

"I thought Miss Burchill little less than an angel," he said, his brows contracting with the old look which Mrs. Hogan used to dread so in the past. And then he added, bitterly, "I little dreamed she could be so tempted by money."

His wife, though full of doubt and sadness also, refused to allow herself to become distrustful. She could not for one inexplicable act on the part of Miss Burchill forget all the lovely traits of character which had endeared the young woman to her, and she answered now, while her eyes ran over with tears she had been trying to repress:

"Don't condemn her like that, Dick; sure it's little we know what feelings may be in her heart."

But Dick was not to be turned from his gloomy line of thought.

"She's not been here lately," he said,—“not since Wiley left here; and when *he* came the other night he

never dropped a word of this affair. They're all alike,—true to the human nature that's in them."

His speech found an echo in his wife's thoughts, but she still tried to defend Miss Burchill, even to the verge of exasperating her embittered husband.

So the news of Robinson's approaching marriage reached even Barbara Balk. She heard it in one of the village stores where she stopped to make a purchase, and she so sharply and suddenly interrogated the shopkeeper, who was retailing the news to another customer, that the man became a little affrighted. He recovered sufficient courage, however, to give her the report as he had heard it.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Balk, with asperity.

"The rumor is just the offshoot of people's crazy imagination. Miss Burchill wouldn't think of marrying such a vulgar, withered old hulk as Robinson."

The man was a little aghast at the spinster's daring denunciation of the powerful factory owner, and he hastened to repeat that the announcement had been made unmistakably by Robinson himself on the previous night.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Balk, again giving her head a toss that sent her hat awry. We'll wait and see. Old Robinson mayn't be so sure of his own words sometimes," and she departed, leaving the shopkeeper suffering from the intimidation with which she had inspired him, for half an hour after.

Her thoughts were not the calmest as she pursued her stiff, angular way through the village streets, and she hardly waited to be well in the house before she screamed to Helen, who was just vanishing into the parlor:

“Do you know that old Robinson is going to marry Miss Burchill?”

Helen came out of the parlor, and stood facing Barbara with one of her old, soft, silvery ripples of laughter.

“Didn’t *you* know it?” she said, in her cooing voice. “My poor Barbara! you are quite behind the age; and I thought you kept yourself so well-informed of all that concerns Miss Burchill.”

Barbara’s thin lips came together with the snap that betokened intense though smothered anger, and she glared, without speaking at the widow. The widow did not lose a particle of her smiling effrontery. She even affectedly posed, as if to invite a longer look, and resumed as Barbara made no effort to speak:

“My poor Barbara, perhaps you are also in the dark about other things. Do you know that Mr. Thurston has gone from Eastbury, from the factory? Gone for good? Perhaps, in Miss Burchill’s mortification at losing Mr. Thurston, she was glad to wheedle Mr. Robinson into her matrimonial net.”

Miss Balk found her voice:

“Gone for good, is he? *My poor Mrs. Phillips,*” imitating the latter’s tones as nearly as she could, “how

have you survived his departure? It must have been the harder since you have failed also in making a conquest of old Robinson, but I suppose Miss Burchill's superior claims to truth and general goodness of character left your paltry charms no chance. *Poor Mrs. Phillips!*"

The look and tones of the speaker were particularly provocative, and Helen felt for the moment as if she had sufficient strength to crush the spinster. In her temper, which rose with such heat and fierceness that it left her no control, she did not stop for an instant to consider the prudence of her words.

"General goodness of character," she repeated, using no longer the cooing accents in which she had first spoken, but hissing her words out. "She springs from nice stock to have general goodness of character, Her uncle is the notorious escaped convict Chester Horton, and, regarding my failure in the way of conquests, as you put it, I have not failed at least in getting my revenge. It is *I* who have come between Gerald and Miss Burchill, if, indeed, he ever intended to marry her." In her ungovernable excitement she was spurring out the words. "*I did it.* Do you understand, Barbara Balk? And it is *I* who have been the means of making Miss Burchill consent to marry old Robinson. She will marry him to save her uncle, Chester Horton, to whom Robinson has given a home at The Castle and employment at the factory on condition that Miss Burchill will give him her hand. She loathes him, I know she does,—

loathes him as I would do if I had to marry him,—and I feel that she loves Gerald. So she will be wretched as I am, and I am staying here in Eastbury to look upon her misery,—to watch her after she has married that horrid old man, and to see in her face tokens of such misery that death would be sweet in comparison. So, spare your pity, Barbara; I have accomplished my aim, and I shall revel in the gentle, the charitable, the good”—speaking with mocking emphasis—“Miss Burchill’s wretchedness.”

Such a look came into Miss Balk’s face as Mrs. Phillips had never seen there before, and it at once somewhat alarmed and subdued her. Without being able to divine what mischief her impetuous words might have done, she would have given worlds to recall them, and she waited in anxious silence for a reply. But not a word came from the tightly set lips of the spinster, nor a look save the one strange expression which conveyed such indefinable fear to the widow.

“Why don’t you speak?” exclaimed Helen at last. “Why don’t you say some of those caustic things that your nature battens on?”

“Because I don’t choose to,” answered Barbara dryly, and without another word she took her way past Mrs. Phillips to the stair and up to her own room. There, however, her face assumed a different look. She smiled, and once actually laughed outright, while at the same time she busied herself in opening a little old-

fashioned trunk and taking therefrom a sealed paper. Then she made other preparations, filling a satchel with such articles as one might require on a journey and changing her dress for a heavier and darker one.

That afternoon, while Mrs. Phillips was secretly visiting Robinson at The Castle, Miss Balk was taking her way to New York.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. RODNEY, more than usually absorbed in intricate legal business, was rather startled from the same by the abrupt and unannounced entrance into his private office of Miss Balk. On learning that the partition of translucent glass was all that separated the lawyer from the clerks in the business chamber without, she had swept by them without even answering their question as to her desire to see Mr. Rodney, or their request to her to wait while they would give information of her presence. They were too bewildered by the suddenness and boldness of her action, as well as by her strange and somewhat awe-inspiring appearance, to attempt to prevent her entrance into the legal sanctum.

“Are you Mr. Rodney?”

The little gentleman, somewhat dazed both by the absorbing character of his recent occupation and this apparition—for, with her thin shrewish face and great piercing black eyes, she seemed little less,—was perhaps for a moment hardly sure of his own identity, for he answered in a bewildered, uncertain sort of way:

“I am.”

“Are you the Lawyer Rodney that figured in the case of Mr. Phillips’ contested will, counsel for Mr.

Thurston in that case ? ” And Barbara’s tones, slightly raised in her eagerness, were very shrill.

Rodney was recovering himself and beginning to be quite sure of his identity :

“ I am, madam.”

“ Then read this,” proffering him the sealed paper she had taken from her little old-fashioned trunk in Eastbury.

He took it and turned it to find the superscription. There was none.

“ It is sealed, madam,” he said, “ What right have I to open it ? ”

“ The right which I give you. It was I who sealed it long ago.” Her tones sank and trembled a little.

He opened the paper. The penmanship was in a large, legible, manly hand, and covered a page or more ; but before he had half read it his face flushed and paled, and his hands shook so that he could scarcely steady the paper sufficiently to read it. When he had finished, a single exclamation escaped him, “ Good God ! ” Then he looked at Barbara. Her eyes were flaming, and the shadow of a smile seemed to play about her thin, compressed lips.

“ Is this true ? ”

The lawyer leaned toward her in his eagerness, and spoke in a husky whisper.

“ Is not there a notary’s name appended on the other side ? ” she answered. And then she continued, as she

put her finger on the name of which she spoke, "That notary was summoned and requested to sign his name, not as a witness to the document itself that he could certify to its contents, for he never knew them,—he was not permitted to read them,—but simply to testify that he had heard from the writer's own lips that he, the said writer, did draw up and write that document."

"Where is this notary now?"

"Living in Salem. I have never lost sight of him, not knowing when he might be needed."

And Miss Balk's shadow of a smile became a real one, expressive of immense satisfaction.

"But the date of this," resumed the lawyer, glancing again at the paper, "is thirteen years ago. Why have you not brought it forward before?"

"Because it didn't suit me to do so," answered Barbara, with an expression of face and asperity of tone which warned the lawyer that he must probe no farther in that direction.

She drew another paper from an old-fashioned bag on her arm, and placed it open before the lawyer: "Here are all the facts you require. I wrote them down to save myself the time of giving them to you by word of mouth. You'll find there all the addresses you need, and also something else that I thought had better be told." Then she prepared herself for departure. "We understand each other now, Mr. Rodney, and I shall say good-by."

She extended her hand.

“ Good-by, Miss Balk,” having learned her name from one of the documents; “ and if I should need you, where am I to look for you ? ”

“ Anybody in Eastbury will tell you.”

She had gone before he could even summon a clerk to attend her out, and he turned to the mysterious documents as if for proof that the recent scene was not an hallucination. But another perusal of the papers convinced him of the real character of their contents, and also of the necessity which existed on his part for prompt and rapid action. Other business was put aside, and the remainder of the day spent not alone in the desk labor entailed by those strange documents, but in visits to many of the civic authorities. When night came he was on the road to Salem, and the evening of the fourth day from that of his interview with Miss Balk saw him signaling for entrance to The Castle.

CHAPTER XLII.

ROBINSON'S winter company had come, and hilarity reigned in The Castle to an extent it had reached hardly ever before. This was partly owing to the factory owner's own abnormal frame of mind. Within the memory of any of his guests,—and there were those among them who had made the regular biennial visit from the very first issue of the invitations,—Robinson had never shown so utter an abandonment to the mirth of the hour; indeed, to the astonishment of all, he had frequent new diversions to propose, and he was himself the perpetrator of more than one surprising and amusing jest. They set the lively change in him down at last to the fact of his approaching marriage. He had announced that fact to his guests immediately on their arrival, but he had also to couple it with the statement that Miss Burchill declined to resume her relations with the company until after the ceremony; and as the ceremony in accordance with her wish, must be strictly private, he would be obliged to limit the stay of his visitors, which limitation, however, should be amply compensated for in the future.

And the guests, though somewhat disappointed by this intended curtailment of their pleasure, were yet thankful for and quite prepared to enjoy their present good things; nor did the fact of Miss Burchill's absence, she who had mingled with them on other occasions, disturb them in the least; neither did they miss Gerald Thurston. A sense of what they owed to their host made them ask for Cora, who in her attachment to Miss Burchill had determined to follow her example of seclusion, and even to regret frequently her absence. Her uncle, however, was content to let her have her way, all the more as it afforded him an opportunity of inviting Mrs. Phillips to his evening festivities. With neither Cora nor Mildred present, the widow could mingle as often as she liked with the company at The Castle. And she gladly availed herself of every opportunity to do so, acting with unusual vivacity of manner, and even assuming a regard for and delight in Robinson's presence that were extremely flattering and pleasant to the factory owner. Her unsatisfied and tumultuous passions impelled her to this course. She lived now but for one aim: to see another as unhappy as she was herself; and when her voice was softest in Robinson's ear, and the touch of her dainty hand most gentle on his arm, her mind was gloating over the repugnance, the horror which Miss Burchill must feel in consenting to become his wife. While she smiled on him she was taking an inventory, as it were, of every line in his

repulsive face. Her whole being shrank from him, and her sensations when he bent to her were those of sickening disgust. But even then she was conscious also of a feeling of triumph, for would not Miss Burchill be the constant victim of just such emotions?

Barbara's absence on the night of the day on which the latter had gone to New York had surprised and even alarmed Mrs. Phillips not a little,—Barbara who had never been a night away except when she boarded at Mrs. Burchill's and who to Helen's knowledge had neither relatives nor friends to visit. She thought frequently and with nervous disquietude of her own imprudent words, but she as often dismissed the notion that they could have anything to do with Miss Balk's unusual absence. On the next day she was invited to The Castle to make one of the gay party assembled there, and when she returned that night, Miss Balk was at home.

“Where have you been?” asked Helen, so relieved at seeing Barbara that her tones were almost cordial.

“Visiting,” briefly responded Miss Balk.

“But where?” persisted Helen. “I never knew you had any friends to visit.”

“Certainly none that I have made by such tricks as Mrs. Phillips uses,” and Barbara swept past the astonished widow into another apartment.

Miss Burchill and Cora were not the only people in The Castle who kept themselves apart from the visitors,

Wiley, who had many and grave reasons for doing so, also secluded himself; and though Robinson was confident that there could be no danger, now that his brother-in-law had changed considerably in appearance, and the hue and cry after him had subsided, he did not persist in requesting him to be introduced to the company.

Cora saw him often; indeed, he seemed to watch for opportunities of speaking to her, and she was too eager for them herself not to respond to them. Thus they were seen so frequently together by some of the servants that it came to be a sort of secret gossip among them, and comments were made as to whether Mr. Robinson favored what appeared to be a fast growing attachment. In this way Mildred came to hear it: a servant at work in the apartments of the governess, and desiring to gratify her own curiosity, ventured in her homely way to broach the subject. Miss Burchill answered quietly enough, and with a firm assurance that the questioner's supposition was wrong; but in her own mind new and troubled thoughts arose. What if Cora's impetuous, ardent affections had gone forth to Wiley in the way asserted by servant gossip?

Might not Wiley, in his own intense parental love, be unable to tell that the preference which his child evinced for him sprang rather from the impulse to love him as a suitor than from any natural filial instinct? Then, also, she remembered that, while the girl had

seemed to be as confiding as usual, there was yet an unwonted abstraction about her air at times, and even a melancholy, which, owing to Miss Burchill's own unhappy state of mind, she had not sought to question. Now, however, she reproached herself for not having been more vigilant, and she went at once to Cora.

The girl seemed to be at her studies, but from her abstracted, listless and even weary air, it was evident that her mind was not on the subject before her.

She smiled on Miss Burchill's entrance, and the latter fancied that even the smile was forced and strange.

"There is something the matter with you," she said, seating herself beside Cora, and taking Cora's hand; "you are not like yourself, nor have you been for some time."

The girl affected to look up in surprise, and to put the same feeling into her tones as she answered:

"What do you mean?"

But the first glance into the kind, earnest eyes fixed with affectionate interest upon her own disarmed all the pride and reserve she had summoned to her aid, and she burst into tears.

"I don't know what *is* the matter with me," she said. "I am at once happy and unhappy,—happy in Mr. Wiley's society, happy in thinking of him, and yet unhappy in remembering the gloom by which he seems to be haunted; then I am tormented by the strangest yearning to do something which would put away this

melancholy from him, and altogether I feel that if he were to go away from The Castle I could never, never be happy again."

Miss Burchill had heard sufficient. She needed no more to tell her that the time had come for Cora to be told of her relation to Wiley; and while she could not assume the responsibility of there and then enlightening her, she determined that the communication should be delayed no longer than that evening. She would see her uncle herself, and explain the necessity which existed for telling Cora.

That evening she sent a note to Horton, requesting him to meet her in a remote and seldom used room at the end of the main hall as soon after getting the message as possible, and having received the reply that he would be with her immediately, she hurried to the appointed place. This particular time had been selected by her because, being the dinner hour for Mr. Robinson and his guests, she would be more secure from observation, and she hurried through the halls, thankful that she did not even meet a servant. Somehow, strange and unreasonable as it was, there had come to her recently an indefinable dread of being seen in any part of the house save that which contained her own rooms, and she shuddered as she thought how soon even the poor privilege of such seclusion would be taken from her.

In the main hall, however, she was confronted by Mrs. Phillips. That lady, brilliant from the combined

effects of her own natural beauty and an exquisite costume, was on her way to the dining-room. Mildred after one surprised and hasty look, would have passed on, but the widow sprang before her.

“I must speak to you, Miss Burchill,” she said, with her prettiest and most appealing air. “I must congratulate you on your engagement to Mr. Robinson. So fortunate as you are; it will take you from a life of poverty, and possibly, humiliation. Indeed, Miss Burchill, you are to be envied for the shrewdness and policy by which alone you must have been able to secure such a suitor.”

There was a ring of mockery in the soft tones, which, combined with the last taunting words, aroused within Mildred such a spirit of indignation as perhaps she had never felt before. She closed her mouth firmly lest the hot retort which sprang to her lips would burst forth, and when she had regained her self-control she answered, quietly, but with a sternness of manner before which Helen with all her effrontery, quailed a little:

“Were your congratulations other than the sarcastic ones they are, I should be compelled to doubt them from your own admissions in the past of untruthfulness. Regarding your unkind and unjust opinion of my engagement to Mr. Robinson, I forgive you, and I hope your own conscience in the future will not arraign you too severely for it.”

She was gone, leaving Helen more of a prey than ever

to the malicious and vindictive feelings which so constantly possessed her.

But Mildred was sorely troubled; every suspicion, every distrust of the widow which ever had sought entrance to her mind, came now with redoubled force and persistency. It was hard for her to doubt longer Mrs. Phillips' deceit. She thought of the letter which had been intrusted to her by Wiley, and she felt, though not without a struggle against the conviction, that Mrs. Phillips had opened that letter and given its contents to Robinson. Her very heart sickened, and she leaned for a moment against the door-post before entering the room, that she might recover her wonted demeanor. And as she leaned there, pressing her hands on her wildly beating heart, she made one rapid but firm decision: to obtain from Robinson the promise that after her marriage Mrs. Phillips should never on any pretence visit The Castle.

Her uncle was waiting for her, and though his face still retained much of its haunted, melancholy expression, there was so cheerful an air about him that she strove also to assume a cheerfulness, lest her depressed manner might weigh upon him.

She told him in a few words and with *naïve* delicacy the object of her summons. He was shocked, and at first somewhat incredulous; then he covered his face with his hands and turned away. Mildred quietly and gravely waited; her own thoughts were so varied and

tumultuous it gave her breathing time, as it were, to put them at bay. When he uncovered his face and turned to her he was frightfully pale, and the lines about his mouth seemed more marked and numerous.

“I thought not to tell her,” he said, “for some time yet; during that time my innocence in some way might be proved, or I might pass to a better world. In that case she need never have known; but now to tell her all! and perhaps she will believe with the world that I am guilty. But she is my child, my only one, and as such she *must* love me. Tell her, Mildred, go to her now and tell her all; then send her to me. I shall wait for her here.”

He seated himself by the table, and buried his face in his hands.

Miss Burchill left the room and hurried to Cora.

The girl was in her own apartment, sitting by the window and gazing with moody abstraction out on the clear, starlit frosty night. So absorbed was she in her thoughts that she did not seem to notice Miss Burchill enter, and it required a repetition of her name to make her answer.

The proper execution of her hurried commission was a source of no little anxiety to the governess, and now, having seated herself in order to begin it, she hesitated so strangely that the girl wondered and begged to know what was the matter.

“I want to enlist your sympathies for some one,”

she began at last,—“some one who has suffered much, and who is now placed in a strange and trying position.” And then she told her uncle’s story, concealing names, and making it appear as if it were some tale which had suddenly and recently come to her own knowledge. Cora was in complete ignorance that the tale had anything to do with herself, and she listened, with burning cheeks and brimming eyes, as Mildred depicted the agony of this man; agony lest the child who had learned to love him while ignorant of his relationship to her, should spurn him, when that relationship should be revealed, because of the guilt which the world said attached to him.

“How could she?” burst out Cora. “When she would know him to be her father, she would—she must—love him more.”

Miss Burchill arose:

“This story is your own, Cora. Mr. Wiley, or Chester Horton, the escaped convict of whom we have both read, is your father.”

“*My father!*”

She had arisen also, and now stood like a statue, color and even the power of motion seeming for the moment to have fled.

“Your father,” repeated Mildred, softly,—“your sorrowful, loving father.”

“My father!” said the girl at last. “Oh, why was

I not told before?" Tears came to her relief, and she threw herself sobbing, on Mildred's breast.

Waiting only to have the burst subside, Mildred said, softly again:

"Go to him; he is waiting for you in the room at the end of the main hall."

She needed no second bidding; and she fled down the stair and through the hall, dashing past some of the guests, who were coming from the parlors, in a way that called forth exclamations of wonder and affright. But Cora, heedless of it all, went on; and Robinson's attention could not be attracted by any report of her strange conduct, owing to his own presence being desired in another part of the house, where Rodney waited to see him.

The last doubt of his child's affection was dispelled from Horton's heart when she bounded to his arms, and sobbed within them in all the wild affection of her impetuous nature. But in that very moment of exquisite bliss, when his heart was melting in tenderness, it was also cruelly wrung by its old haunting fear of rearrest. To be torn from her now, when she knew, and knowing, loved him, would be worse than death, and he pressed her to him, and kissed her again and again, while his tears mingled with her own.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. ROBINSON was in a most cordial spirit. The satisfactory progression of affairs in and about The Castle conduced to such a feeling; and he would not have refused to see even a charitable committee, had any called upon him, while he was in this genial glow.

What, then, were his emotions of surprise and delight when Rodney's name was announced! He supposed that gentleman bore some message from Gerald; perhaps even to the effect that Gerald would yet visit The Castle in time for the wedding; and of all the inconsistent and selfish desires which the factory owner secretly entertained, that of having Thurston present at his marriage was foremost. Consequently, his greeting of the lawyer was so unprecedentedly hearty that the latter was momentarily dumfounded. He recovered himself, however, and returned the welcome in his own quick, gracious way, at the same time resisting all Robinson's efforts to make him join the guests at dinner.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said, a little testily, when he found his good nature so persistently repulsed. "You've come to stay a spell, haven't you, and to give me word about Gerald?"

Rodney answered, rapidly:

“I have come upon the strangest piece of business in which it has ever been my lot to engage.”

And then he stopped short, and steadied his little twinkling eyes sufficiently to look very significantly into the factory's owner's greenish eyes.

Robinson began to feel slightly uncomfortable. His glow of good nature subsided, and the hard look returned to his face, and the grim coldness to his manner, as he asked:

“What is it?”

“Take a chair then, Mr. Robinson; the story is a little lengthy, and it may try you somewhat before it is quite told.”

He seated himself as he spoke. Robinson sat down as he was requested to do, but only on the edge of the chair, and in such a bolt upright position that he looked as if he anticipated some bodily harm, and was prepared to start up in instant defence of himself.

“Twenty years ago,” began Rodney, in his rapid way, and accompanying his words by twinkling glances that seemed to go in several directions at once, “a young man came to this country from England. By intelligence, tact, and ability he became, after the lapse of a few years, the confidential head clerk of a prosperous banking firm. To him was intrusted not alone all the important charges but the partners themselves often came to him for information and counsel. One partner, more than the others, made a trusted adviser of the

young clerk, and in his kindness frequently insisted upon helping him to keep the books. In this way they became very fast friends.

“One morning the clerk went to the bank. The hour was an early one for bank officers, but early hours in business was a habit with this young man. He opened his private office as usual, and turned to the safe in which the books were kept. That he also opened. The books were as he had left them, but a roll of checks dropped out. He took them up somewhat puzzled, knowing that he had not recently placed any checks in the safe. They were checks drawn upon the firm for various sums of money, and signed and indorsed with his own name. He stared aghast. His pen had never touched such checks, yet the handwriting was an exact imitation of his own. More and more bewildered, he drew forth the books. Once opened, they gave every evidence of having been handled since he had put them away. Leaves were crumpled, turned down at the corners, and in several instances wholly torn out. Now convinced that gross mischief had been done, he turned to the safe where the money was kept. That was untouched. Gold, silver, and notes lay in the same careful piles in which he had last placed them.

“He turned in a bewildered way to the large office table, which stood in a shaded part of the room, and as he did so his foot came in contact with a soft, yielding substance. He looked down and beheld a man’s

foot protruding from beneath the table. He dashed aside the table, and saw the dead body of the senior partner of the firm, the same gentleman who had called to consult him on a matter of business in that very room just at the conclusion of banking hours on the day before. A white pocket-handkerchief, stained with dried blood, lay on the breast of the dead man; but, too horrified to make any further examination, the young clerk fled to summon others to the scene. The dreadful news circulated quickly, and what was the clerk's amazement and horror to find himself apprehended as the guilty party? Everything told against him. The senior partner was seen to go into the clerk's private office. He had even told another partner, whom he met while on his way to the office, that he was then going to speak to the clerk upon some matter about which he himself was troubled.

“Nobody saw him come out of the private office; in fact, nobody saw him at all after that interview with the clerk. An examination of the books revealed changes to large amounts in the clerk's own account with the bank, which fact, in addition to the checks drawn in the clerk's name, seemed to be undoubted proofs of guilt. In some of the books whole pages were torn out, as if to destroy other proofs of the tampering with the figures. Then, no one possessed any keys to the safes or to the clerk's office, save the clerk himself. But the most damning proof of all was the discovery of the

clerk's own name on the handkerchief found upon the body of the dead man.

“To all these proofs the clerk could offer alone his utter ignorance of the checks, and of the condition of the books. The books were quite correct when he left them the evening before, and as to his interview with the senior partner, it had been rather brief, owing to the fact that the latter decided to defer mentioning what troubled him until he should have further proof that his fears were well founded. But even that statement increased the weight of evidence against the accused, for it was confidently supposed that the senior partner had received outside information which reflected upon his trusted clerk, but, owing to his natural goodness of heart he had refrained from taxing him with it just then.

“In relation to the handkerchief, the clerk also ingeniously told how by the merest accident during that interview both men happened to lay their handkerchiefs down in close vicinity; each in returning the article to his pocket took not his own but his companion's, which change the clerk discovered only when he reached home.

“The partner who had manifested so much friendship for the young man continued to do so still, and it was owing to his efforts that the young fellow, when he found the futility of every effort to prove his innocence, effected his escape. But he was recaptured, and on

circumstantial evidence, he was convicted and sentenced to a life imprisonment.

“The affairs of the bank were found to be in a ruinous condition, large sums of money had been mysteriously paid out, and no record of the transaction, owing to the missing leaves of the clerk’s books, could be found. So, the remaining partners became bankrupt, and he who had been so warm a friend of the convicted clerk was obliged to retire to a life of comparative poverty. His family consisted of one daughter and one other relative. From the time of the bank failure his health and spirits declined, and, while he retained sufficient of both to give to his daughter all the advantages of education and culture which he himself possessed, he himself was never happy. In fact, the decline in his health seemed owing entirely to the decline in his spirits. When attacked by his last illness he called to his bedside his relative, and told her the secret which had undermined his health,—the secret which I shall now tell you.”

Thus far the factory owner had not made a motion; indeed, he scarcely seemed to wink as his eyes continued to fasten themselves on Rodney’s face. Nor did he now move; his attention and interest were so intense that he hardly seemed to breathe.

“This disinterested partner,” the lawyer resumed, “had ingratiated himself with the clerk, and had so kindly insisted on keeping certain of the books, regard-

less of the time and labor which it cost him, only that he might have opportunities of himself robbing the bank. He had been tempted into speculations which failed, and to save his child from poverty he drew sums which were not his and falsified the accounts in the books. He could not tamper with the accounts under the eye of the clerk, but he watched for and found an opportunity of taking impressions of the office and safe keys. From these impressions his own set of keys were made, and he was in the habit of secreting himself in the bank until the late night hours, when, having access to the books, he could do what he would with those of which he had charge; and he contrived to have charge of such as recorded his own accounts with the bank. The clerk, too honest and ingenuous himself, never thought of questioning or examining in any way the books which the partner kept; and so things went on until that eventful night. But the senior partner had accidentally heard something which aroused in his own mind a secret suspicion of his colleague in the firm. Being a man of the old-fashioned goodness, more disposed to accuse a delinquent to his face than to inquire into his misdemeanors behind his back, he at once secretly spoke to his partner. The partner appeared to explain everything, but he could see that the doubt of his integrity which had been raised was not quite dispelled, and he determined to stay that very night in the bank and destroy all proofs of his guilt, making it appear as if a burglary had been committed.

“Meanwhile, the senior partner had sought an interview with the clerk, possibly to mention to him in confidence what troubled him, and perhaps, to inspect the books wherein were kept his partner’s accounts. He did not do either, however, possibly owing to his hesitation to believe in his doubt, and he left the clerk, not to go home according to his wont, but to retire to his own room in the bank to cogitate still further on what yet continued to trouble him. The clerk, however, shortly after went home, and the partner, nervously eager to alter the books, and supposing that he was alone in the bank, hastily repaired to the clerk’s private office. In his haste and entire confidence that he was quite alone he did not even lock the door of the office, but proceeded to his work. He opened the books, here crumbling a leaf, there turning down pages, and, where his own accounts and those of another partner’s stood, tearing out whole leaves, in his shrewdness divining that, if *his* accounts alone were torn out, suspicion of some sort must rest upon him. In the midst of his labor there was a light knock at the door, and before the guilty man could recover from his astonishment the door opened, and the senior partner entered. The senior partner’s solitary cogitations had taken such strong and obstinate form that he determined to submit them to his confidential clerk, and knowing that the clerk sometimes remained in the bank until long after hours, he returned to the private office with the hope of finding him. His astonish-

ment at seeing the suspected partner in his place was so great that he was speechless for a moment, while his eyes rapidly surveying the open books, the torn leaves, not yet disposed of, convinced him that all he had feared was absolutely true. He was a man of terrible temper when aroused, and it burst forth now in passionate accusation. The guilty partner could offer no defence, and, too proud to invoke any clemency, he bore all in silence until the senior partner turned to sound the alarm for a constable. That the guilty man would not brook, and he sprang on the senior partner. He was much the stronger of the two, and as they clinched and fell he had an opportunity of fastening his hand firmly in the neckerchief of the prostrate man; he twisted it tightly, and held it so until the witness of his guilt was no longer able to testify against him. Scarcely realizing that he had committed murder and laboring under an uncontrollable excitement, he had still cunning enough to devise plans for averting all suspicion from himself. A handkerchief lay on the floor; it had been in the dead man's hand when he entered the room, and had dropped in the encounter. Fearing that it might be his own, and so betray him, he searched for the name: it was that of the clerk. While he held it and while he looked at the body, hesitating whether to leave it as it had fallen, he saw a tiny stream of blood dyeing the side of the forehead, which must have been struck in the fall. He wiped the blood with the handkerchief and threw it on the dead

man's breast. That might be one link which would fasten suspicion on another; but then, in order to make it a substantial link, the accounts of the clerk should be shown to be wrong. He sat down again before the books, and with feverish haste altered the figures of the clerk's own accounts with the bank. Still he was not satisfied. Now that he had committed so dreadful a crime, every precaution must be taken to avert suspicion from himself. He thought of the unsigned checks, and knowing where they were he brought them forth.

“From boyhood he had been able to imitate any penmanship, and, familiar as he was with that of the clerk, it was scarcely an effort to sign and indorse the checks. Cunning had lent him strange courage. He drew the corpse under the table, where it could not be seen readily; he replaced the books, locked up all, and managed to get out of the bank without being seen by even the night watchman. He exerted himself in favor of the convicted clerk only as a balm to his own haunted conscience. That was somewhat appeased by the fact that the poor clerk escaped hanging; but, now that he himself was dying, his dreadful secret was too much for him. He told it all to this relative of his, and then, his guilty soul still tormented, he wrote it out, and had a notary called in as a witness, not to the contents of the paper, but as a witness to the fact that the dying man swore he had written those contents. His worm-eaten conscience had also compelled him to save the very leaves

he had torn out of the books of the banking firm; these also he gave to his relative.

“She, however, was made to swear that she would not use the confession until after the death of the daughter of this dying man, should she be the survivor, unless by its use she could prevent the commission of any further gross wrong. In the case of her death being first, she was to leave the confession in the hands of the daughter.

“A gross wrong was about to be committed, and in order to prevent it the confession had been used. The result will be publicly known in a day or two at most. Do you understand my story, Mr. Robinson? Do you know the characters concerned in it?”

Robinson made the first motion he had made since the commencement of the tale. He bent forward and said, in a husky whisper:

The clerk is my brother-in-law, Chester Horton.”

“And the partner, Mr. Robinson,—who is he?”

Rodney was also leaning forward, but the factory owner only stared without replying.

“The partner,” resumed Rodney, “was Mr. Brower, the father of Mrs. Phillips.”

“Methusala!” exclaimed Robinson, and for a second his mouth remained open in astonishment.

Rodney bent closer still:

“And you, Mr. Robinson, I understand, have won Miss Burchill’s consent to marry you in order that her uncle, Chester Horton, may escape rearrest. As Hor-

ton's innocence will be published through the length and breadth of the land in a day or two, it will be incumbent upon you to release her from her promise."

The red spots began to glow on the factory owner's cheeks and his mouth twitched involuntarily, but he rose and said, steadily enough:

"I suppose it's no use asking you how you came by all this knowledge, and it's no use, either, crying arter spilt milk. I suppose I'll have to give Miss Burchill up. I don't mind tellin' you that it'll cut me up dreadful, though, for I like her. She's a fine girl, and I meant to make her love me arter I got her. You want to see Chester Horton right away, I suppose, or maybe you have already seen him, or written to him and Miss Burchill, too?"

"I have not. Neither of them knows a syllable of what I have told you; but Horton must return with me to New York to-morrow. There are some preliminaries to be attended to which will require his presence," answered Rodney, not a little surprised at the easy manner in which the factory owner had relinquished his expectation of marrying Miss Burchill."

"Then you *must* stay at The Castle to-night," said Robinson, emphasizing the *must* and placing, at the same time, his hand familiarly on the lawyer's shoulder. "Come, Rodney," he continued, doing his utmost to make his manner exceedingly warm, "don't think me such a bad, hard fellow as some people do. I know Ger-

ald felt awful cut up about Miss Burchill, and I suppose he's prejudiced you agin me. But it's all made right now; so jist let us be friends, will you?" He took his hand from Robinson's shoulder and extended it. The lawyer grasped it, deeming a show of friendliness the best policy under the circumstances. "I'll send Chester and Miss Burchill to you, but I've a small favor to ask of you: will you see that this thing is not told to any one else in the house until to-morrow."

"Certainly," replied Rodney; "there's no hurry in making it known until it is publicly proclaimed."

Robinson left the room, and sending a servant to summon his brother-in-law to Rodney, he went himself in search of Miss Burchill.

It was the first time during her residence at The Castle that the factory owner had ever entered the little parlor assigned to her private use, and his presence there now frightened her. Had he come to insist upon her fulfillment of the marriage contract? But it could not be, for there was a fortnight yet; still she paled and trembled, and he, seeing her fright, smiled and purposely refrained from speaking for a moment; then he said, jocularly:

"Ain't ready for the marriage yet, be you?"

"Mr. Robinson!" Her very lips were white, and they seemed powerless to frame another word than that frightened utterance of his name.

"Well, don't be skeered. I ain't come to insist on

you marryin' me. I've come to tell you that you needn't marry me. Rodney's downstairs with all the proofs of Chester's innocence."

She did not seem to understand him. He repeated what he said, adding a fuller explanation.

Her uncle's innocence proved, her own enforced and hated marriage contract with Robinson annulled! She comprehended all at last, and she could not speak from very joy. The color came rapidly back to her cheeks and lips, and her large soft eyes shone with an expression which seemed to light up her whole face, and which made her look to the factory owner prettier than ever. His narrow, callous heart loved her with an intensity that he had never known before, and it impelled him, since he could not have her love in return, to have, at least, not her hatred.

"Mildred," he said, with so strange a softening of his tones that it instantly won her readily aroused sympathy; "let me call you so this once, while I ask you to forgive me for endeavoring to force you to be my wife, and while I ask you now not to hate me, but to feel kind of friendly to me."

His voice actually trembled as he said the last words, and his very manner was so humbled and abashed, so strange a manner for him, that Mildred could not resist the impulse to pity him.

"I do forgive you, Mr. Robinson," she answered, "and I do not hate you now."

"If you had married me," he said, still in his strangely humbled way, "I should have tried to deserve you. I meant to grow kind to the people, and to make them forget that I was so hard as they say I am; but it's all over now," straightening himself, and resuming almost his wonted manner, "and as long as you're willing to be friends with me, I'm satisfied. Jist make The Castle your home as usual. Go down now and see Rodney. I reckon Chester knows the story by this time, and don't tell any one else in the house to-night anything about it. As Cora don't know Chester's her father, there ain't no need on telling her yet."

"She does know; she learned it to-night; we thought it better to tell her."

"Methusala! What a heap of strange things come together sometimes. To think of her jist discovering he's her father on the very night that the tale of his innocence is brought down here. Well, you'd better tell her too, then, I suppose, but git her to keep the secret until to-morrow."

He was gone, leaving Mildred to wonder whether she was just awakening from a delightful dream. In a few minutes, however, when she had descended, and found with Rodney not only her uncle, but Cora, the girl in happy tears, she was convinced of the truth of the glad tidings.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHAT Robinson's purpose was in requesting that Rodney's strange information be confined to a few breasts until the next day had reference to one of those sudden thoughts which occasionally influenced the factory owner, and in relation to that sudden thought he immediately, on leaving Miss Burchill, ordered his own light private conveyance. Among some of the guests who happened to see his preparation for his departure was Mrs. Phillips, and she, with most bewitching familiarity, ran up to him to know how long they must be deprived of his company. He smiled very fondly, or what he meant to be such, down upon her, and answered that he was only going to the farther end of the village on a little business. An hour at most would be the time of his stay.

Within the hour he returned accompanied by a gentleman whom he ushered into a vacant parlor. Then, waiting only to divest himself of his outer wraps, he went in search of Mrs. Phillips. She, on learning that Mr. Robinson wanted her to accompany him immediately to his study for the purpose of consultation, went into a flutter of delighted wonder. It made her very

important in her own eyes, and of course in the eyes of the guests who saw him in search of her, and who marked his manner to her.

She accompanied him at once, forgetting for the moment that she might be again a witness of the nervous attack which prostrated him and terrified her. But the moment that her foot passed the threshold of the study, with its array of lights, she remembered, and she paused timorously and looked at him. He understood her hesitation:

“You needn’t be skeered. I’ve had my spell for this night; had it while I was out. You see, it pooty near always comes at the same hour.”

Thus assured she went to the chair he indicated, not noticing that he had softly locked the door and taken out the key. Never had she looked lovelier, and the very play of the lights upon her added to the brilliancy of her complexion and the grace of her exquisite form. She was able to assume also such graceful postures, neither constraint nor yet unwomanly ease in any of her attitudes. And now as she carelessly seated herself, leaning slightly forward, with her jeweled hands clasped in front of her, she looked like some exquisite picture out of its frame.

“Was it upon his approaching marriage that Mr. Robinson desired to consult her?”

How prettily and lightly she mouthed the words! That marriage was the food of her soul. She lived in

anticipation of it, for the misery of her hated rival would be a balm to her own wretchedness.

“Yes; it is about the marriage,” answered Robinson.

And then, without a word of warning he told her in his own short, homely way the tale which he had heard from Rodney; and, like Rodney, he suppressed names until he reached the end. Thus Helen learned that she was the daughter of a forger and a murderer, and that she was to be disappointed in her expected revenge, for the factory owner had relinquished his claim to Miss Burchill’s hand.

Of all the dreadful emotions which that strange story caused to war in the widow’s breast, that aroused by the disappointment of her revenge was the keenest and most dreadful. She was no longer beautiful; the working of her rage distorted her countenance, and the exquisite complexion gave place to so livid a hue that, in the glare of the lights, it became ghastly.

“It is not true,” she shrieked, “this horrid tale. I will not believe it.”

He did not answer her, and the sight of him sitting so still and cold, save for the shadow of a smile which was more like a grin playing about his thin, set lips, was as strong a proof of the truth of the statement as if he had made repeated affirmations.

“I *shall* not believe it,” she repeated. And then her overcharged emotions broke forth, and she cried and sobbed like a child.

Still Robinson did not speak. He only watched her with that same covert grin. The outburst spent itself, and she raised her head, wailing:

“What shall I do?”

“Do? I’ll tell you. I was only waiting for you to git kind of quiet before I’d speak. Jist you marry me, and that’ll make things square. Nobody’ll say anything to you when you’re my wife.”

Mrs. Phillips sprang to her feet.

“Me marry you!” she exclaimed, horror, disgust, and contempt struggling with each other for expression in her face and voice.

“Yes; marry me,” repeated Robinson, also rising and letting into his countenance that look of hard, cruel determination which Helen on another occasion had seen and shrunk from. “If it’s so dreadful hard to become my wife, you’ve played the hypocrite about as nice as the old one himself could do it. You’ve been a-giving me your sweetest smiles and looks till I didn’t know but what you’d like to be in Miss Burchill’s place, and now, when you git the chance to be, you jist back out like a balky filly. But the fact of the matter is, Mrs. Phillips, I ain’t going to be cheated out of a wife, and since I had to give up Miss Burchill, I jist made up my mind to have you; so, while I have been out, I have fixed matters up in such a way that you’ll have to marry me whether you want to or not.”

“*Have to marry you!* What do you mean?”

She looked like an enraged tigress.

“Now jist keep quiet. All them tantrums ain’t a bit of use, for I’ve jist got you fixed. You know that letter of Chester’s to Miss Burchill that you opened? Well, marry me, or go to the state prison for that. I have the letter you gave me in my possession still, and every proof to fix the guilt of opening his sealed letter upon you. Then you once told me about the last scene between you and old Phillips. I’ll git that brought up, too, and have you convicted of perjury, and then Gerald’ll obtain his rights. So, you see, I’ve jist cornered you every way, Mrs. Phillips, and knowing that, I went after Parson Tabor, and he’s waiting in one of the parlors all ready to splice us. We’ll have the ceremony right in here. You’re dressed pooty enough, and we’ll surprise the guests by a sudden invitation to the wedding. This room is so large I guess they’ll all git in.”

She was on her knees in terrified supplication to him. He laughed at her and bade her make her decision quickly.

“Then give me a month—a week—a day—till the morning.”

“Not an instant longer than ten minutes. I’ll give you ten minutes. Call me when you’re ready.”

He walked to the extreme end of the apartment, and she, frantic, flew to the door as if she would escape somehow. It was locked, and she beat against it in her despair until her hands were sore and bruised. The fac-



“ Maybe you think I ain’t got things fixed for your arrest ? ”

tory owner did not seem to care. He knew that the servants were too well instructed to dare to make open investigation of any untoward noises they might hear, and as none of the guests had any business to be in that part of the house, Helen might beat against the door and cry as long as she would without fear of succor reaching her. She seemed shortly to realize that fact herself, for she desisted in her efforts, and threw herself on the floor, weak from rage and despair.

"The time's about up, Mrs. Phillips, and as it's all the same to me whether you become my wife, or whether you go from The Castle as a prisoner, I want your answer pooty quick. I'm going to have fun of some kind here to-night, and if it ain't one it's got to be the other. I reckon the excitement of your being taken away to prison would be enough for the guests for a good spell. Maybe you think I ain't got things fixed for your arrest? I jist attended to that, too, while I was out, for I kinder thought you might kick agin marrying me. So jist give up them tantrums of your'n and answer me."

She rose up slowly and looked at him. The pitiless determination in his face convinced her that he would execute his threat.

O God! how retribution had overtaken her! The pitfall she had dug for another had ensnared her own feet, and with a low, moaning cry of despair, she buried her face in her hands, and sank to the floor again.

"This ain't no answer, Mrs. Phillips," and Robinson,

stooping, put his hand on her shoulder. The loathsome touch aroused her. She sprang up and away from him shrieking:

“Don’t touch me!”

Her very aversion to him increased his cruel determination, but he repeated, in the tones he had used before:

“Give me your answer.”

Since marry him she must to escape the horrible fate of a prison she would marry him, but she would escape from him as quickly as possible after. So she flung up her hands, and recoiled still farther from him, as she shrieked:

“I’ll marry you.”

He strode after her, pursuing her, for it became a sort of chase, she retreating as he advanced until the wall brought her to a stand at last. Then he said:

“You consent to marry me, but there is another thing you’ll have to consent to, that is to let the marriage go on quietly without making any scene, or stopping it in anyway. If you do, I swear to Moses I’ll do jist what I threatened to do, and I’ll tell your hull story to the hull company. Do you understand? For, as I said before, it’s the same to me, one thing or the other. I liked Miss Burchill, and I’m dreadful riled to give her up; but since I can’t have her, you’ll do. I’m not going to be cheated out of a wife, and you’re pooty enough for me even if you are so deuced wicked.”

Knowing that there was no release for her, and feeling that the quicker the ceremony was over the surer and the speedier might be her escape from The Castle, she nerved herself with a strength born out of her very desperation.

“Summon your minister,” she said; “I am ready for execution.”

She was wedged against the wall, her eyes gleaming as they never seemed to do before, and her breath coming in quick, labored gasps. She had gathered the skirt of her dress to her, as if she feared he might touch even that.

He fain would have touched her, would have drawn her to him and attempted to soothe her, but something in her face deterred and frightened him. So, forced to be contented with what he had obtained, he went from her to ring the bell in order to summon a servant, looking back at her, however, as if he feared she might lay violent hands upon herself; nor did he for one moment relax his vigilance.

The servant who answered the bell was told to summon to the study the gentleman whom he would find waiting in one of the parlors, and likewise all the guests. He was also told, though in a lower voice, to extend the summons to Mr. Wiley, Miss Horton, Miss Burchill, and Mr. Rodney.

The minister and guests came, the former arriving first, and the latter too full of delighted wonder and ex-

pectation to suspect for what purpose they had been summoned, even when they saw the factory owner, Mrs. Phillips, and a very ministerial looking personage seated together at the end of the room. Robinson would not leave the side of his affianced even to pay a brief courtesy to the wonderstricken guests. A servant ushered them to seats, and when impulsively interrogated by an impatient lady, who was too plebeian to refrain from questioning domestics when it suited her, as to the purpose of the summons, the man gravely shook his head; he was as ignorant as were the guests of his master's designs. Miss Burchill, Cora, the latter's father, and Rodney were the last to arrive; they, too, as much in wonder as the guests, were assigned to seats, and then appeared a mysterious scene. Robinson and Mrs. Phillips, she with features as white and set as if they had been marble, stood up, and Parson Tabor, with book in hand, stood up also. It looked very like the preparation for a marriage ceremony. Could it be such? And if so, what did it mean? Robinson was engaged to Miss Burchill, yet there sat Miss Burchill among the guests, as completely mystified, to judge by the expression of her face, as any of them. Only Rodney seemed to understand it. He bent forward and whispered in Wiley's ear:

“By Jupiter! but the old cove is going to marry Mrs. Phillips.” And he leaned back and laughed to himself until the tears shone in his eyes.

In a few seconds everybody was convinced that it was a marriage ceremony. Robinson's responses were loud and distinct, but Helen's could be heard only by those who were near her. She thought of another marriage ceremony performed six years before; she thought of her wretched life since then; she thought of Gerald, still the idol of her soul, and with whom all hope of any reconciliation must be abandoned forever; she thought of the horrid old man to whom she was now bound, and then, in her agony raising her burning eyes, they fell on Mildred Burchill's astonished countenance. That she, of all people in the world, should witness this climax, as it were, to her misery was too much for even Helen's unusually strong nerves. For one second her eyes flashed upon Mildred with malicious hate, then her rage and despair culminated in a shriek—a wild, piercing, agonized shriek—that brought every one simultaneously to his or her feet, and she fell, white and senseless, to the floor. But the ceremony was over, and she was Robinson's wife.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE Castle seemed to be a strange house that night. Indeed, from the subdued and awe-stricken manner of the guests and from the gloom which pervaded, it might well justify all the weird and extraordinary stories that ever had been circulated about it. Not a word of explanation had been vouchsafed of the strange event in the study. The newly-made Mrs. Robinson had been carried above stairs by her husband, and the company were left to conjecture among themselves. The parson, quite as much astonished at the dramatic *dénouement* of the ceremony as anybody else, could impart very little information; he had simply been called upon by Robinson himself that evening, and engaged to perform the marriage. To Miss Burchill they would have turned, supposing, of course, that she must know, but that young lady in company with Cora and the two gentlemen who had entered the study with her, had quietly withdrawn as soon as the bride had been borne out. She was now in her own little parlor, engaged in anxious conference with Cora and the aforesaid gentlemen.

“The fate intended for you, Miss Burchill, has been given to Mrs. Phillips,” said Rodney.

“I am afraid that she, too, was forced into it,” said Mildred with a shudder.

Wiley, as we must still call him until he himself resumes his name, had been watching his niece with strange earnestness as she spoke. He rose and went over to her.

“Do you remember,” he said,—and he paused as if something in his throat prevented his utterance; when he resumed, his voice was slightly husky,—“the day that I first learned of your engagement of marriage to Robinson? Do you remember what I said to you? How did you refrain from telling me then that it was to save me that you were going to sacrifice yourself? How have you kept so quiet about it since? To think, O God! that you would have done all this to save me.” He covered his face with his hands to hide the emotion that threatened to unman him, but Mildred withdrew his hands and held them in her own, while she said softly:

“Am I not well rewarded?”

There seemed to be a sudden and most unusual bustle in the corridor just outside,—a sound of rapid, heavy steps, and two or three voices speaking together in excited alarm; and before Rodney, who was nearest to the door and wondering at the noise, could spring to open it, there were repeated heavy knocks. He opened the door to see the blanched faces of two or three of the servants. Horrified fear seemed to have taken posses-

sion of all their senses, and, forgetful of every propriety, they burst out together:

“Come quick, Miss Burchill! Mr. Robinson wants you. Mrs. Phillips”—in their excitement they had forgotten that she had changed her name—“has gone stark, staring mad. She has nearly murdered Mr. Robinson, and she’s thrown the wax lights about, and set things on fire, so that he had to ring and scream for help.”

Miss Burchill became as blanched as themselves, and she rose in an uncertain, bewildered way, as if she knew not whether to obey the summons.

“I shall go with you,” said Wiley, who was already standing, having risen on the entrance of the servants, and he crossed to his niece. Cora wanted to accompany them, but her father waved her back.

“A mad woman is no sight for you,” he said; “remain here with Mr. Rodney until we return.”

The fear-stricken servants led the way to Mr. Robinson’s private apartments, and at every turn they were met by some one of the panic-stricken guests. Some of the latter, knowing not what further dreadful thing might happen in that mysterious house, were, late though the hour, making preparations for an immediate departure, while others but deferred their going until the morning.

The devastation which Mrs. Phillips, or Mrs. Robinson, was said to have committed was hardly exaggerated.

More than half of the lights that burned in the gorgeous bedchamber were extinguished, and in many places the fallen candlesticks and the singed and burned appearance of the curtains and tapestry hangings gave evidence of the violence that the lights were said to have suffered at her hands. In addition, a costly mirror lay smashed to fragments, and the heavy candelabra lying amidst the ruins bore testimony as to how the havoc had been accomplished. Everything in the room betokened a struggle; chairs were lying overturned, and the draping of the bed hung in torn strips or rested in crumpled masses on the floor. Robinson himself presented a sorry picture. His face was bleeding, the bosom of his shirt torn and also blood-stained, while one of the sleeves of his coat hung in tatters from his arm.

He was in such a state of excitement that his voice could not steady itself for an instant as he shouted to the servants and some of the guests who were crowding the doorway to leave the apartment. Mrs. Robinson was extended on a lounge, and firmly held there by two of the male domestics. Blood was also upon her dress, the torn and disordered condition of which bore little likeness to its elegance of an hour before. Her hair swept in one wavy, tangled mass about her shoulders, and her eyes and cheeks were blazing with all the dreadful fire of violent insanity. She was, indeed, as the servants had expressed it, "stark, staring mad," and now, as her struggles to free herself from the strong, united

grasp upon her were more and more ineffectual, she shrieked as people are said to do when life is going out with some violent gasp.

"Clear the room!" commanded Robinson, with stern authority, though his voice was hoarse and trembling; and then, as Mildred and Wiley entered, he went himself and slammed the door in the faces of those who persisted in gratifying their curiosity.

Miss Burchill sickened a little at the scene in which she found herself, and she could not help recoiling from Robinson when he approached her, but he was too excited to notice it.

"I sent for you," he said hurriedly, "thinking you might be able to do something to calm her until the doctors git here. I've sent for two on 'em, and I reckon they'll say she'd better be sent to an asylum, but I ain't going to let her go from The Castle. Eh, Chester?" looking with strange eagerness into the face of his brother-in-law. "What do you think? She's my wife, and I ought to keep her here, eh?"

Wiley shook his head:

"If she's going to be violently insane for the rest of her life, I doubt your ability to manage her."

"Oh, I'll manage her, now I know what she is," he answered, with something like his customary grin, which, with the blood-stains on his face and his general appearance, made him hideously repulsive.

"My! how she sprang at me and fought! The first

thing I know'd, when I brought her up here and she got out of that fainting fit, she had the lights hurled about and the mirror over there smashed; and then she sprang at me and clawed my face with her nails, and tore my shirt bosom with her teeth, and if it weren't that the things got afire I'd have managed her without any help. But Methusala! when I seen the way things was a-flaming, and felt that she was a-gitting the strength of a wild beast, I jist had to summon the house."

He seemed to forget in his excitement that among his listeners were the two servants who still held his mad bride.

"Speak to her, Miss Burchill," said Robinson; "maybe the sound of your voice'll recall her."

Mildred went to the struggling woman and knelt by her side, calling her name gently; for an instant, at the sound of the voice, the struggle ceased, and the wild eyes fixed themselves on the speaker's face, but that was all. There was no recognition, and the struggles were resumed, and the fearful shriek again rang out.

"Perhaps the person who lives with her—Miss Balk—may be able to do something. Have you sent for her?"

"No; I never thought of her. I'll send for her now."

He did so, and just then the doctors were announced.

Their decision was that Mrs. Robinson should be sent as soon as possible to a lunatic asylum, and they at once

secured her so that she could not do harm to herself or to others. They pronounced the case a hopeless one of exceptional violence, the result apparently of a dreadful shock, and they questioned to ascertain what shock she could have sustained; but Robinson denied that she had received any shock, at least to his knowledge; neither did he announce to the somewhat puzzled physicians his intention of making The Castle her asylum. He reserved that announcement until he should have the best medical advice from Boston, which advice he intended to summon the next morning. He was not concerned about the suspicions that must arise regarding his hasty marriage. Helen was his wife, and the most rigid investigation would not be able to gainsay that fact, nor could it prove that he had laid any violent hands upon her; he certainly had not, save in self-defence, and the blood upon her dress was only that which came from its contact with the blood she had drawn from him. Of what the whole village would say of him when the story, with its dreadful details, made even more dreadful by the customary exaggerations of servants' lips, should be known, he cared little. It could scarcely say worse things than it already had said, and so long as he had secured his aim in making Helen his wife, mad though she was now, he was satisfied.

A little latter, an answer was received from Miss Balk,—an answer which was quite characteristic of that lady's caustic and eccentric disposition. Since Mrs.

Phillips had chosen to become the wife of Mr. Robinson, to Mr. Robinson Miss Balk surrendered all charge of or interest in Mrs. Phillips. Sane, or mad, Mrs. Phillips was now Mrs. Robinson, and as such Miss Balk no longer knew her,—an answer which made Robinson, his brother-in-law, and Mildred look at each other; but they made no remark, probably because they did not know what to say.

Lights shone all that night in The Castle; every room seemed to be illuminated, for neither guests nor servants could sleep. Rodney was perhaps the only one to whom slumber came, for, after seeing the patient (Robinson on the conclusion of the doctors' visit, having sent for him), he said to himself:

“By Jove! if retribution is not well meted to Mrs. Phillips! She is paying compound interest for all her infernal treachery and deception. She sowed the wind and she is reaping the whirlwind.”

The opinion of the skilled physicians from Boston was much the same as that of their brothers of lower professional rank; and to Mr. Robinson's announcement of keeping his wife in The Castle they offered no objection when they found that he intended to have the same care taken of her as there would be in the asylum. A competent nurse would be immediately provided, their services would be permanently engaged, and a part of the house was to be exclusively assigned to the patient. Then Mr. Robinson turned his attention to his brother-

in-law and Rodney. Rodney had delayed his journey to New York in order to know the result of the visit of the Boston physicians, and now he, accompanied by Wiley, was ready to set forth.

“I want one thing settled before you go,” said Robinson. “I want you to promise, Chester, that you won’t go away from The Castle, you nor Mildred. I want you now more than ever since she’s”—pointing to the part of the house where Helen raved—“that way. Will you promise?” And without waiting for an answer, as he saw a doubtful expression cross Rodney’s face, he continued, “You can make it all right with Gerald jist the same; tell him to come here. He’ll come quick enough now, I reckon. Will you promise, Chester?”

Wiley could promise for himself but he hesitated to promise for his niece; so then and there, the factory owner brooking no delay, Miss Burchill was sent for. She looked pained when told of the object of her summons, for since the preceding night a longer residence in The Castle had become utterly repugnant to her. It seemed to contain so much that was repulsive and hideous, and now that it was to continue to hold that poor mad creature, the very atmosphere of the place had grown distasteful. They read her objections in her face before she spoke; and Robinson, with that strange softening of his tones and manner which she had once before experienced, entreated her to remain. Her uncle also

was extremely disposed to agree to the proposal, and even Rodney said:

“I think it is the best plan, Miss Burchill.”

Thus adjured she did consent, and she withdrew to acquaint Cora, while her uncle and the lawyer departed for the train, and Robinson went to his raving wife.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AMID all the legal business which the proving of Horton's innocence demanded, Rodney found time to write a lengthy letter to Thurston. How his pen flew over the paper, detailing every iota of the strange events which had taken place,—Mrs. Phillips' dreadful retribution; Miss Burchill's noble self-sacrifice; Robinson's own desire to have Gerald know all that had happened; and, lastly, an entreaty to the young man to return immediately.

That letter reached Gerald in a little German village whither he had gone for novelty and forgetfulness,—reached him as he was going out for a stroll in the bright afternoon,—and he put it into his pocket, not being in any haste to read it, feeling that no very interesting news could come to him now. But, oddly enough, the very act of placing it in his pocket recalled an evening seven years before, when he went forth, also with a letter lying close to his bosom,—a letter which his impatience already had devoured twice, and which his love for the writer fain would have placed in his very heart. All returned to him now,—the love with which he once loved her; the shock caused by her deception; the calmer and the deeper love which had caught him in its

toils; the disappointment sustained also in that; the bitterness that seemed to flood his whole life since. It made him groan aloud, and he walked on to the suburbs of the village that no curious eye might read in his face traces of an emotion he could scarcely conceal.

More to distract himself from his thoughts than from any other motive, he drew forth Rodney's letter and read it,—read it twice, three times, and then he lifted his hat and stood looking up in reverence and gratitude. It seemed the first thing he ought to do in reparation for his distrust of Providence, who so truly had cared for and guided him through the mazes of trouble he had traversed.

His answer to Rodney was penned with as much celerity as that gentleman had written, and then he proceeded to write to Miss Burchill; but it was no brief letter which he wrote. His admiration of and love for her, now returned and increased tenfold, impelled him to pour out his whole soul, and so it was the history of his own heart which he inscribed. He concealed nothing, going back to his early boyhood, when his first great grief was the loss of his mother; his life afterwards passed in a Southern city with his father, a proud man and one of ungovernable temper when it was aroused.

“He was the owner of several slaves, and one day,” the letter continued, “I came accidentally upon him in a fit of uncontrollable rage with a slave, a man of fifty years or more. His rage took the form of personal vio-

lence to the trembling culprit, and as I saw the riding-whip in my father's hand descend in repeated heavy blows I could not endure it. I sprang upon my father, wrested the whip from him, and bade the slave begone. He never forgave me. I had wounded his pride so severely by thus, in his own eyes, degrading him, that every impulse of his stern and haughty nature was aroused into implacable anger against me.

“He bade me also begone, and I, too, cut to the quick by his unreasonable wrath, took him at his word. I left him, and we never met again. I have some reason to believe that he relented at the very last when death was upon him; but through the years which succeeded our unhappy parting I could learn nothing that would indicate a softening upon his part, and I, also, was too proud, and considered myself too much injured to sue for forgiveness. To my mind I had done nothing that required pardon, and I thought the first overtures should come from him.

“His lawyer, Mr. Rodney, was my warmest friend, and he used every effort to effect a reconciliation; but both of us, father and son, were too proud to make the first advances, and at length, in a fit of anger that Rodney should persist in his efforts for me, he transferred all his legal business from Rodney to Lawyer Miller. Shortly after a relative died and left him a vast fortune on condition that he would legally change his name from Thurston to hers,—Phillips. He did so, and it was

under that name that Miss Brower met him. Perhaps I have been to blame in not telling Miss Brower during her engagement to me all that I have now frankly told you. But I told her father, and he sympathizing with my reluctance to speak oftener than was absolutely necessary of a subject so painful to me, and sympathizing also with a hope of which I could not divest myself that I should one day again be taken to my father's heart, and then would be time enough to tell her, entirely favored my wish to say nothing to Helen. Had she known, it might have prevented some unhappy circumstances."

In deference to Mildred's own gentle charity he did not say more of Miss Brower's relations with himself, but he went on at once into another subject,—a second manly offer of his heart and hand to Miss Burchill, and then he ended by stating the probable time of his departure for New York.

Immediately that the letter was dispatched he began counting the days which must elapse before it would reach her hand, and then he pictured her surprise, and he hoped—though, with the unreasonableness of all ardent lovers, he feared it might not be so—her delight, when she should read the contents. He had purposely fixed the date of his departure a little latter than was necessary, in order to give her ample time to receive the letter and be prepared to meet him.

His fears would have been quite dispelled could he

have seen her when at length his letter reached her, and she had read its contents more than once. She sank to her knees in gratitude and pressed it to her lips amid the happiest tears she had ever shed.

But all her joys for which she was so devoutly thankful were tempered and saddened by the constant thought of that poor raving creature in another part of the house. She visited her voluntarily every day; Helen, beyond a momentary fixing of her wild eyes, paid no attention. And yet among her incoherent and meaningless utterances were often the names of Gerald and Mildred, sometimes shrieked in a way to make any listener shudder, and at such times Miss Burchill was glad enough to get out of sight and sound of the unhappy woman.

All Eastbury had enough to gossip about for weeks;—Robinson's sudden and unexpected marriage to the widow, and her ensuing insanity; Wiley not Wiley any longer, but Chester Horton, the escaped convict, and now proved to be entirely innocent of every charge against him, and the recipient of congratulations from some of the wealthiest and most influential men both of Boston and New York; Cora Horton his daughter, and he himself the brother-in-law of Robinson; Brower the deceased banker, whose character while living was supposed to be the very essence of probity, now proved from his own confession to have been a forger and a murderer; and lastly, Barbara Balk continuing to live as she had done in the little house so long occupied by Mrs.

Phillips, and never manifesting the slightest interest in her late companion, for somehow the message which she had returned, when informed of Helen's sudden marriage and subsequent madness, had gotten abroad. Surely, here was material enough to supply every breakfast, dinner, and tea-table of the good Eastbury folks with gossip for a long, long time. And it did. Not another topic could find place for discussion, nor would it be listened to with any degree of interest while The Castle contained such interesting people.

Perhaps to no one did the manifold strange tidings come with such a revelation as to the Hogans. Mrs. Hogan cried from very joy.

"Sure I knew, Dick," she said, looking up into her husband's face with that expression of artless confidence which always touched him in spite of himself, "that we couldn't be deceived in Miss Burchill's character. She was too kind and gentle always to do anything that would be wrong and the report of her going to marry Robinson must have been a mistake."

Eastbury gossip, while it had learned much, had not learned the truth about Miss Burchill's engagement to the factory owner.

Dick hung his head, concurring silently in his wife's charitable opinions.

The recently made bride was dying. Insanity's fire was too violent for her not over strong frame, and it consumed her daily until she now lay too weak even to

struggle, so that her bonds could be removed with safety, and she might be permitted to pant away her life unrestrained except by the kind watchfulness of those who attended her. But little remained of her once exquisite beauty. Her hair had been shorn close to her head—the doctors demanding it,—and her blooming complexion had given place to a ghastly pallor, while her eyes, though retaining their beauty of form, had lost the exquisite softness which had been their chief charm, and her forehead, drawn almost constantly by her contortions into unsightly wrinkles, had grown at last to retain the ugly impressions, while her cheeks, having become so thin as to form great hollows, made her look years older. Robinson, whether from affection or a sense of remorse, was her constant attendant, and his touch, as he sometimes caught her hand or pressed his own upon her forehead, seemed gentle and kindly enough. She did not shrink from him, nor struggle in any way now. All power to do that had gone, and the only sign of life she gave was her continued heavy breathing. Her eyes were fixed on some point directly in front of her, nor would the touch of a finger upon her eyelash cause her even to wink. Her sight seemed to have vanished. Mildred and Cora were by her bedside, and both were silently crying. There was something so inexpressibly sad in this poor soul going forth to the dread eternity without one returning gleam of reason, one moment of consciousness in which to say

“Our Father,” and Mildred, on her knees, bent the closer to the damp, pallid face, and breathed more fervent prayers for the passing soul. There was a movement of the hitherto still form, a twitching of the limbs, a partial cessation of the heavy breathing, a return apparently of sight and expression to the fixed eyes, and then from the partially opened mouth came one distinctly uttered word “Gerald!” and the soul of the speaker had gone forth forever.

Had a last momentary gleam of reason been vouchsafed to her, in which remorse and still unconquered love, or both, had wrung from her that name, or was it the desire of her soul for him whom she had so cruelly wronged, forcing itself up to emit at the last its yearning and heartbroken cry? None might know; it was one of those secrets which rest alone between God and his creature.

Mildred came forth from the death-chamber, and descended to be met in the main hall by Thurston. He had arrived in New York sooner than he had expected, and, his impatience brooking no delay, he had taken the first train to Boston and thence to Eastbury. Catching her to him impulsively, he drew her into the parlor.

Surprise and joy, together with the sad emotions which still somewhat influenced her, kept her silent, though her looks gave him all the welcome he wished. Noticing the traces of tears on her cheeks, he asked in some alarm, the cause.

His question aroused anew her pity for the poor dead creature above stairs, and she said, with a burst of tears:

“She has just died.”

He knew whom she meant, and he became as sorrowful-looking as herself. Somehow, death in most cases levels all anger and animosity, and so softens in its grim light that which had aroused our displeasure that we pity and forgive almost unconsciously.

It was so with Gerald. The rancor in his heart for his stepmother seemed to go suddenly out, and to leave in its place a sad, pitying feeling that was more akin to tenderness than even to pardon from a sense of duty.

“Will you come with me and look at her? Her last word was your name.”

He allowed her to lead him, and in a few moments he stood in the death-chamber beside her bed, and opposite to Robinson. It was across her dead form that Robinson extended his hand in welcome, and then both men looked down at her,—she who had held so near and so strange a relation to them both.

The cold, pallid, rigid face bore scarcely a trace of resemblance to the woman he had once loved, and after a brief survey, Gerald turned from her. He had forgiven her, but he was eager to forget her.

Eastbury had another fruitful theme of gossip in the death of Mrs. Robinson, and in conjecturing what sort of a funeral she would have. They were not a little

surprised when they found that the factory owner seemed determined to pay every respect to the memory of his dead wife. The servants reported her as lying in a sort of state on a magnificent bier in one of the parlors, and some of them went so far as to give surreptitious views of the corpse to their intimate friends.

Miss Balk, of course, heard of the death, and she immediately took her way to The Castle, asking, when she arrived for Mrs. Robinson.

"Mrs. Robinson is dead, ma'am," said the astonished servant.

"I know she's dead," answered Barbara, with grim severity; "if she were living I would not have to come to see her. I have come expressly because she *is* dead, and I must see her."

The man in much doubt as to whether he should admit her, and yet in too much awe of her to refuse, found his hesitation cut short by Barbara sweeping past him with an angrily spoken:

"If *you* don't know where to conduct me, I can find someone who does."

She did not wait for the man's rapid steps behind her, but went on at her very smartest pace, apparently careless of the part of the house to which her course might lead her. But the domestic overtook her, determining as soon as he should usher her into the presence of the dead to tell Mr. Robinson. He said, when they reached the parlor where the dead woman lay:

“She’s in this room, ma’am.”

At the same time he opened the door very gently, and only opened it sufficient for Barbara to pass in; but she, giving him a look from her black eyes which he swore to his fellow servants was a look of the evil one himself, flung the door wide open and stalked in.

The room was very large, and on an elevated bier in the centre reposed the remains of the recently made wife. There was no one present, being early in the afternoon, and the custom of the New Englanders to leave no watchers with the dead. So Barbara could act without fear of espionage.

The bier was as elegant as skill and taste could make it, and the poor corpse as fair looking as a costly white shroud could render her. But her face remained the same changed and somewhat repulsive thing it had become a little while after death. Barbara went very close to the corpse.

“You can’t answer me now, Helen,” she said: “you’ll have to lie there and listen to all I have to say to you. You can’t rise now and face me, and scowl, and fling your pretty sarcastic speeches at me. You’re quiet enough, and your bonds won’t break, nor lessen, I ween. Do you hear me? Does my voice reach your soul, that has met its retribution at last? Does your spirit writhe and scoff at my words? It is no use, Helen; you will have to listen, for all that, for it is *my* turn now.

“ There was bad blood in you, Helen, you had to be what you were; it was in your mother before you, another beautiful devil like yourself. She knew that I was engaged to your father, that the very day had been set for our marriage, and yet, with her beauty and her wiles, she came between us. I didn’t blame him, he couldn’t help yielding to the temptation, for she ensnared him. I hated her. I could have killed her, and the only way to save myself from doing some desperate thing was to keep out of her sight. But she died when you were a baby, and then your father sent for me. He wanted some one to take care of her child. I loved him still, and so I went to him. After a little he would have repaired the wrong he did, by marrying me, but I, being no such spiritless thing as that, refused him.

“ You grew like your mother,—like her in looks, like her in that apparent amiability that used to make me feel like clawing her into some sort of temper; but I meant to be just to you until your intolerable vanity and tricky disposition made me hate you as I had hated her. I hated everybody who seemed to be won by your beauty or your manners; for that sole cause I hated Thurston.

“ Your father must have known something of my feelings, for I took little pains to conceal them, but he was so broken down by secret guilt and remorse of his own that he did not pay much attention to them. When he was dying he told me the dreadful crimes he had com-

mitted, but I wasn't to tell them until your death, should I live the longer, unless the telling of them should be necessary to prevent the commission of any further great wrong.

"A further great wrong was about to be committed. Poor fool! Out of your own mouth came the admission that through you Mildred Burchill was to be forced into a marriage with that old hulk, Robinson. Then was my time and my turn. I told your father's secrets, and you have met your deserts.

"That is all, Helen. I am going now. I wanted to have a last interview with you, just to tell you these things, and I didn't come before, because they said you were mad, and I knew you wouldn't understand me. But I guess your spirit hears and understands me now, and I wonder what it thinks of your beauty now? Poor, wretched beauty! it's all gone, Helen, and you are lying there as ugly looking as I am."

She wheeled from the corpse as abruptly as she had advanced to it, and she was taking her rapid way out of the room when she was met by Miss Burchill.

The astonished and somewhat intimidated domestic, unsuccessful in his search for Robinson, had as a last resource, told Mildred, and she, suspecting the identity of the strange visitor, had hurried to see her.

"Miss Balk!" she exclaimed, in a tone of pleased surprise at the same time extending her hand. But

Barbara folded her hands more closely in her mantle, answering:

“There is nothing to give your hand to me for, Miss Burchill.”

Somewhat pained by this repulse, though at the same time determining not to yield to it, since she knew the eccentric character of the speaker, she said again, very gently:

“I think there is, Miss Balk; from Mr. Rodney I have learned that it is to you I owe my release from my promise to marry Mr. Robinson.”

“Events just shaped themselves that way,” answered Barbara, in her severe tones.

“Still,” resumed Mildred, “I owe you not a little gratitude; not alone for my present happiness but for your kindness in the past to my poor old grandfather. I have never forgotten it; I shall never forget it, and for it I pray daily that Heaven may ever bless you.”

For one instant the hard, deeply lined face, looking so steadfastly at Miss Burchill, perceptibly softened; then she gathered her mantle to her, and answered, in her usual tones:

“Memories of kind acts don’t stay in most people’s minds. It’s the memories of things which rankle and burn that stay, and when you’re tempted to be set up by any happiness that comes to you, just think of that poor wretch,” taking her hand from her mantle with a jerk

and pointing to the bier. "She was set up too, once, and what has she come to? A miserable clod."

Without even an adieu she had passed Mildred, and was out in the hall before the young woman could recover from her astonishment sufficiently to see that she was properly conducted to the door.

CHAPTER XLVII.

“ASHES to ashes, dust to dust.” The minister who had performed the marriage ceremony performed the funeral rite, and all that was mortal of the once exquisite beauty was laid away one fair afternoon in one of the lovely resting spots in Mount Auburn. Robinson seemed strangely unlike himself. A peculiar and very unusual restlessness marked his whole demeanor, while frequently strange, abrupt starts and long, strained looks into vacancy would seem to betoken a mind not wholly rational. He evinced no grief for his dead wife beyond a solemn visage and the depth of the crape on his hat, but at the minister’s prayer he bowed his head, and was even seen to move his lips, whether in accompaniment to the petition no one could tell. Was it that this unhappy death had stirred his callous soul and awakened fears for his own end? People who saw him were full of conjectures. Indeed they were far more curious about him—he who had been so long regarded as without the pale of all religious influence—than about the details of the costly funeral.

On the return to The Castle, all except Robinson himself, were surprised to meet Rodney. He had taken

his departure but a couple of days before, and without intimating any speedy return.

“I have come on business that interests you all,” he smilingly answered, “and right after dinner I want to hold a conference.”

The conference was held, but without the factory owner.

“Robinson will not join us until he knows the result of our meeting,” explained the lawyer, and then, laughing aloud as he looked from one to the other of their astonished faces, he began as soon as he had composed himself:

“Providence works strangely, and justice, when it seems farthest removed, is often nearest to us. Here is this wealthy Robinson—this hard, shrewd Yankee as he is—carrying with him for years a childish and incredible fear of ghosts, or “spooks,” as he calls them. He insists that for years he has never failed to see them, mostly at a certain hour every evening, and to help to ward off the dreadful fear in which they put him he has numerous lights ablaze in his study, and even in his bed-chamber, for sometimes they visit him there. That was the reason he required Miss Horton’s company every evening, though whether she saw the spooks or not I am unable to tell.”

He addressed himself with a smile to Cora, who flushed deeply and answered:

“I never saw anything, but uncle used to get into

dreadful states, and at first he told me it was only nervousness; afterwards he accidentally revealed that he saw strange things.”

“That was also the reason,” resumed the lawyer, “that he wanted to marry. He felt, somehow, that his burden of fear might be lessened did he have a wife to help him to carry it, and now, however, that he has obtained a wife only to lose her so speedily, he is in greater dread than ever of these ghostly visitations, and he would throw himself upon the mercy of you, his friends and relatives, to bear him company,—at least, during these trying times. That you can only do by consenting, all of you, to remain at The Castle. He is aware that Miss Burchill and Mr. Thurston are only waiting for the day of their marriage, which is at hand, to take their final departure from Eastbury; that Mr. Thurston desires to engage in business, in New York, and that Miss Burchill, or, as she will be then, Mrs. Thurston, will accompany him. In order to obviate this necessity, Mr. Robinson has already taken the necessary legal steps for putting Mr. Thurston into possession of the wealth which he is convinced the late Mr. Phillips desired to leave to his son, and not to the lady who married him while she was bound by a promise of marriage to another. Rich as Mr. Thurston speedily will be, there will remain no necessity for him to engage in any business. It is also Mr. Robinson’s desire that The Castle be enlarged and improved in

accordance with the wish of any of its present occupants. That is all, and I now wait your answer to this poor, fear-stricken old man."

It was a minute or more before any one could speak. Then the warmest congratulations came to Gerald from every voice, and while he answered them he was secretly thinking of the beneficent and inscrutable ways of a loving Providence.

"Now, what shall I say to Robinson?" asked Rodney, rising.

All eyes turned to Gerald, but he looked at Mildred.

"Which shall it be?" he asked softly. "The Castle or New York?"

And she, with humid eyes, answered, without a moment's hesitation:

"The Castle."

The factory owner seemed the most anxious for the wedding, taking almost a childish interest in the simple preparations, for Mildred would have no display. One of her first acts was a munificent present to Mrs. Hogan, and a cordial invitation to her to visit The Castle. But Mrs. Hogan answered:

"You'll forgive me, dear, if I refuse; somehow, I can't bring myself to set foot in Robinson's place. I know he's changed, and the people talk of him as being softer in his ways, but I have a feeling for him here"—putting her hand to her breast—"that, while it wouldn't harm him, still won't let me think of him much. So

you'll forgive me, dear, and may the blessing of Heaven be on your marriage and on your whole life after."

The wedding took place, a very quiet ceremony, followed by a delicious little homelike repast, and the departure of the bridal couple on a week's tour, Robinson having begged them not to make it longer. He counted the days from the moment that they started, and his face wore a strangely woe-begone expression until the morning of their expected return. On that day he rose jubilant, and towards evening, when it lacked but an hour of the arrival of the train on which they were expected, he determined to drive to meet them. By some strange chance the horse which on one occasion put Thurston's life in jeopardy was harnessed to the wagon, instead of the animal the factory owner usually drove. But as the beast had lost much of its viciousness, and Robinson was too impatient to wait to have him changed, he drove on. They went fairly enough until a curve in the road made it necessary to wheel about somewhat. Then the animal's old mettle, which always rebelled at any curb, rose, and in a moment he was beyond Robinson's control. In his nervousness, he dropped a rein; he stooped forward to seize it, but the lurches of the horse drove him, head first, over the dash-board. He fell, his head outward, so that it escaped the hoofs of the beast; but his foot had become entangled in the hanging rein, and he was dragged

along, his body bumping with sickening thuds on the road.

Mr. and Mrs. Hogan were returning together from some errand. The strange sounds behind them made them turn.

“O my God! it’s Robinson,” screamed the affrighted woman, as the rapidly drawn vehicle, with its now bloody and dirt-covered human appendage, came near enough to discern it plainly. “Save him, Dick!” she cried, urging forward her husband; but he needed no bidding.

In an instant, utterly regardless of his own life or limb, he was at the head of the horse, holding him with all his strength. But the beast would still have dashed on, perhaps even flinging to his death Hogan, who so courageously and desperately kept his hold, had not other passers-by come to his assistance.

Robinson breathed, but no more. And it was Mrs. Hogan who pillowed his bruised and bloody head upon her bosom, and shed down upon it scalding tears of commiseration.

In a little while all the village seemed to know of the accident, and, with such tender care as could be hastily provided, the factory owner was borne back to The Castle. His return was simultaneous with that of the bridal couple, and the ghastly, unconscious face which met them was the only welcome he could give.

The doctor said he might live until morning, and

Mr. and Mrs. Thurston, together with Horton and Cora, watched tenderly by his bedside. Every heart had softened to him some time ago, and now his helpless condition roused their sympathies anew. Both Mildred and Cora hung tearful above his pillow, each wishing for one lucid moment in which to whisper some tender words. At midnight, though the doctors had given little hope that such would be the case, consciousness returned to him. He opened his eyes wide, and turned them at once to Mildred.

"I want to speak to her," he said, with difficulty; "go away, the rest of you."

They obeyed him.

"I am dying, ain't I?" he asked, looking fixedly at her.

She told him gently, what the doctors had said.

"Then kneel here," indicating a position quite close to his face; "my breath's failing me, and I want to tell you something." He gasped, and his voice sunk to a whisper. "Bring your ear close. If I whisper, my strength will hold out."

She put her ear close to his mouth.

"When I married my young cousin long ago, and brought her back to Eastbury dead, people said I killed her. She took sick while we were away, and the doctor gave me medicine for her, and at the same time he gave me an application for my head—I used to have stunning headaches then—that looked dreadful like

her medicine, but it was poison. I loved her, she was so gentle and childlike, but I wanted her money. I wanted the money that was so fixed upon her that I couldn't git it until after her death, and I used to think what if by chance these two medicines got mixed; and so I got to looking at them and handling them, and they did git mixed, and I couldn't tell which was which, and the nurse gave her the wrong one. She died, and then I began to have dreadful feelings,—feelings that wouldn't give me no rest nights, and that made me think of her always as she looked when she was dying, with a look that seemed to say she knew what I had done.

“ So I came at last to see her every evening, and to see her dead father pointing his bony finger at me. And when Mrs. Hogan cursed me that time, wishing that I might be always haunted, I thought I'd have dropped, for it seemed to be a sort of guarantee that I'd never be free from the spooks any more. I got to going to the hotel nights about the time that I expected the spooks, and sometimes I fancied I cheated them that way; for, though I felt them with me out on the road, I didn't see 'em, and when I got back to The Castle they didn't seem able to show themselves for more than a second. I used to think that they had only that hour to come to me, but once in a while they came to me up here while I lay in bed. That's the reason I got all the lights in my study and here. Somehow, I didn't feel so skeered when all the lights was round.”

He seemed to be getting stronger, or was it the last and desperate effort of a will which would not yield until he had told all that lay upon his guilty soul? He had even strength to put out his hand and seize the shoulder of Mildred, as if he would brace himself, while he continued:

“ That’s the reason I had so much company. The racket they kept up sort of quieted my fears, and made me sort of stronger to meet the spooks. Then I asked Gerald to live with me. I had an idea of getting him to spend that hour in the study with me that the spooks came; but, somehow, I was ashamed to ask him. So when my sister asked me to care for her little girl I thought that was a good chance of having a companion. I brought Cora here, and had her come to the study every evening. I was afraid at first I’d skeer her, so that she’d never come again, but she seemed to believe what I told her about my nerves.

“ When I first saw you, you looked so much like my dead wife that you kind of skeered me, and when you came here to live I got to like you, and wanted to marry you, because I thought if I was good to you I might kind of appease my dead wife’s ghost some way. But when I couldn’t git you, I made Mrs. Phillips marry me so as to have a wife anyway. She would have to take her turn with these spooks; at least, as my wife, she’d have to stay with me whenever they came to me. The night I married her, the hour for the spooks to

come was when I was out on the road driving for Parson Tabor. And the spooks were with me. I could feel 'em, feel their breath on my face, and feel as if they was a-sitting there in the wagon with me. I didn't mind that so much, so long as I didn't see 'em, and I was hoping that they wouldn't come to me no more that night. They didn't come until arter our marriage. I was upstairs with Helen, trying to bring her out of that faint. She came out of it, and, jist as she stood up and looked at me, right beside her stood the two spooks,—my dead wife and her father. Helen didn't see 'em; she only saw the dreadful terror they put me in, and I reckon that was the shock that sent her out of her mind, for in a minute she had dashed the lights about, and flung herself on me in the way I told you before. By that time the spooks were gone and the things was afire.

“I ain't seen Helen's spook yet, and I reckon I won't till I git to the other side. It's gitting awful dark, Mildred; give me your hand.” He took his own hand from her shoulder, and groped in the empty air for the hand she extended to him.

“Dark!” he repeated. “Dark! Dark!”

With the last words his spirit went forth, and the darkness of death settled upon his mortal eyes.

THE END.

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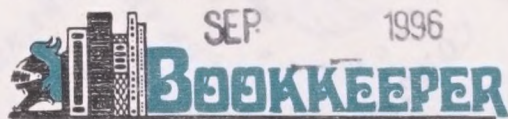
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